



THE WORLD OF THE REVOLUTIONARY AMERICAN REPUBLIC

LAND, LABOR, AND THE CONFLICT FOR A CONTINENT

Edited by ANDREW SHANKMAN

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THE WORLD OF THE REVOLUTIONARY AMERICAN REPUBLIC



In its early years, the American Republic was far from stable. Conflict and violence, including major land wars, were defining features of the period from the Revolution to the outbreak of the Civil War, as struggles over who would control land and labor were waged across the North American continent. *The World of the Revolutionary American Republic* brings together original essays from an array of scholars to illuminate the issues that made this era so contested.

Drawing on the latest research, the essays examine the conflicts that occurred both within the Republic and between the different peoples inhabiting the continent. Covering issues including slavery, westward expansion, the impact of Revolutionary ideals, and the economy, this collection provides a diverse range of insights into the turbulent era in which the United States emerged as a nation.

With contributions from leading scholars in the field, both American and international, *The World of the Revolutionary American Republic* is an important resource for any scholar of early America.

Andrew Shankman is an Associate Professor of History at Rutgers University, Camden, and a Senior Research Associate at the McNeil Center for Early American Studies. He is the author of *Crucible of American Democracy: The Struggle to Fuse Egalitarianism and Capitalism in Jeffersonian Pennsylvania* and over a dozen articles on the early American Republic.

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THE WORLD OF THE REVOLUTIONARY AMERICAN REPUBLIC

Land, Labor, and the Conflict
for a Continent



Edited by

Andrew Shankman

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For Carl Parrini and John Murrin: Teachers, Scholars, Friends

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PREFACE



Soon after the midpoint of the nineteenth century the people living in what a large majority still considered the United States committed a staggering amount of violence. During the Civil War between 1861 and 1865, the Union and Confederate states together put ten percent of their populations under arms. These men killed about 2.4 percent of the total population of what had been the United States prior to the South's secession. To put those numbers in their contemporary equivalents, in 2014 the United States would need to field an army of about 31.1 million people (in 2011 the total armed forces numbered just under 1.5 million) and experience the death of 7.5 million citizens.

These are shocking and sobering numbers that suggest the profoundly unstable nature of the formative years of the United States. *The World of the Revolutionary American Republic* brings together the insights of a variety of talented scholars to convey the reasons for the highly contested and unsettled nature of the North American continent in the years between the American revolutionary era and the Civil War. Conflict and violence defined the American republic during these decades. The revolutionary American republic was born in warfare and then fought three additional major land wars on the North American continent beginning in 1812, 1846, and 1861. Each of these four wars settled some pressing questions generated by the American revolutionary settlement only to immediately produce equally pressing new ones. In between these major wars, the United States fought significant, if smaller, wars for control of the gulf coast, the Great Lakes, and the nation's western borders.

The World of the Revolutionary American Republic shows that a clearer understanding of the formative years of the nation emerges by treating the years between the American revolutionary era and the outbreak of the Civil War as one historical period, a period that should be viewed as the era of the first American republic. Conflicts involving land and labor shaped the violent confrontations and events that were central to the era of the first American republic. Though the outcome of the Civil War raised questions that were both momentous and intractable, it decisively answered the questions and shattered the conditions that had shaped the era of the first American republic. The first American republic ended when the Civil War began.

— Preface —

It is hoped that the essays in *The World of the Revolutionary American Republic* will encourage a thoughtful, tough-minded, but above all compassionate understanding of the diverse peoples who lived through this violent and turbulent period of the nation's past. The period ended with unprecedented bloodshed, but also with the elusive possibility that the issues discussed in *The World of the Revolutionary American Republic*, issues that ultimately brought about that bloodshed, might one day be resolved. The first American republic has bequeathed to contemporary citizens a mighty and an urgent legacy.

—Andrew Shankman

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: CONFLICT FOR A CONTINENT Land, Labor, and the State in the First American Republic



Andrew Shankman

The World of the Revolutionary American Republic explores the efforts of Europeans, Indians, and those of African descent to coexist in North America and then in the land claimed or sought by the United States. Coexistence often produced conflict and violence, particularly over who would control land, how they would control it, who would labor on it, and under what conditions. The eighteen chapters that follow this introduction explore how and why conflicts over land and labor on the North American continent among (mostly English-speaking) Europeans, Indians, and African-Americans were central and pervasive. The often violent interactions among these diverse peoples contributed greatly to the events and conditions that produced the revolutionary American Republic and that shaped its central features and developments between the American Revolution and the Civil War.

This introductory chapter will suggest the broad themes explored by the chapters that follow, and it will offer a framework that can help connect them together. The three chapters treating the period before the American Revolution show that the pre-revolutionary eighteenth century was shaped by European, especially British, efforts to achieve dominion in North America. That aspiration was fiercely contested by Indians who—depending on their fluctuating calculations of their needs and interests—made alliances with each other and with the various European empires. As the chapters by Zara Anishanslin, Trevor Burnard, and Christina Snyder show, eighteenth-century conflicts over the land and resources of the North American continent engaged a diverse variety of cultural groups, while also being closely connected to a wider Atlantic world. North America was a significant part of competing global imperial systems, systems that increasingly sought to co-opt or subdue Indians and to enslave Africans.

The “growth and mastery” that the British achieved in North America between 1700 and the end of the French and Indian War in 1763 reinforced the transatlantic and global nature of the struggle for land and other resources, the conflicts that resulted from these struggles between Europeans and Indians, and the rising significance of slavery.¹ Prior to the American Revolution, the British North American economy hummed in the eighteenth century, compared to its performance in the seventeenth century, in large part because the global trade of the British Empire

boomed. Economic dynamism in the colonies was closely connected to a triangle of trade between North America, the West Indies, and Great Britain. This web of economic connections ensured that Britain's would be a slaveholding empire. British colonial expansion also put land at a premium as population exploded, and as markets for what the land of North America produced grew and grew.

Developments in the eighteenth century cemented patterns and conditions that would shape the revolutionary American Republic. Britons in eighteenth-century North America came to define productive and legitimate use of land by what the land could be made to produce. They dismissed Indians' claims to land by arguing that they used land illegitimately, by hunting on it or moving across it, rather than by claiming it, parceling it out, and either growing things on it or extracting natural resources from it. Colonial settlers' depiction of Indians as barbarous hunters and gatherers ignored the reality of long-standing, sophisticated societies. But the misrepresentation was simply too convenient to abandon.

The claim to be legitimate possessors of the land arose in a context where an unprecedented number of white men and their families living in North America expected to own land and to obtain the household independence that came with it. This real possibility of acquiring land hardened into an assumption that hard-working families living in North America should be able to leave behind the dependency of having to rely on resources controlled by others, the condition they associated with Europe. In North America, rural heads of household expected to acquire a "competency." By "competency," eighteenth-century small landholders meant acquisition of enough land to sustain their families, to establish their sons with landed independence when they married, and to see their daughters marry men who had achieved the same condition. The expectation of competency pitted striving American colonists against Indians, and further encouraged the dismissal of Indians' claims to land.²

Throughout the eighteenth century, as white men demanded their competency, a rising number of people of African descent living in North America were declared enslaved and permanently denied freedom. The increasing, and increasingly obvious, connections drawn between skin color and the status of free and unfree aided British North Americans in their mental marginalizing of Indians. Indians could be placed in a non-white racial category as well. Racial slavery helped to reinforce the alleged savagery of other non-whites. This racialism increasingly allowed whites to view Indians as a single and as a lesser people. Over the course of the eighteenth century, Indians, despite their cultural and linguistic differences, began to have increasingly uniform experiences of whites. As Christina Snyder's chapter powerfully argues, Indians' experiences produced new forms of consciousness that encouraged them to emphasize their sameness rather than their differences, and to think in racial categories as well. Indian-hating was a crucial force in unifying white colonial settlers, as well as a way to justify their claims to land. And viewing Indians as a savage and lesser people became easier as eighteenth-century North Americans built a world where status and condition depended so tremendously on race. Indian unity and a rising racial identity in response to this development only intensified the situation. Increasingly, racial conflict over land was a recipe for intense violence, and the violence reinforced racial categories and race hatred, which further legitimated conflicts to control land, which begat further violence.³

Due primarily to sheer numbers and greater resources, Europeans could place enormous pressure on Indians, and the British gradually eclipsed the French in North America by 1763. The British state could tax and borrow more effectively than the French monarchy.⁴ At mid-century, the British population in North America outnumbered the French by around forty to one. During the French and Indian War (1754–63), Britain outspent France in the North American theatre by a factor of ten.⁵

Britain's spectacular success over France by 1763, and the British colonists' gradual, but relentless, expansion west at the expense of native peoples—an expansion that also spread slavery while increasing the numbers of the enslaved—did not benefit all British colonists equally. The unprecedented and vast sources of new wealth produced within Britain and its empire created real disparities among British subjects in Britain. The same development occurred in Britain's North American colonies. Over the course of the eighteenth century, greater resources and greater wealth also led to a greater concentration of wealth and to growing social and economic differentiation among colonists in British North America. Failing to acquire land in areas where opportunities were often diminishing, settlers left New England, the Delaware River Valley, the Chesapeake, and other settled regions and pushed into the backcountry of western New York, Pennsylvania, the Shenandoah Valley, and North Carolina. The most acute racial tensions occurred where striving settlers and anxious Indians encountered each other on the bloody ground of the west. But the social and economic conditions that were propelling movement west and racial conflict also produced tensions and conflict within the British colonial population. Riots over land scarcity, as well as armed conflict, broke out within British colonial society in the decades after 1750.⁶

These internal cleavages overlapped with the rising imperial tensions that resulted from British efforts to reorganize the vast empire they had suddenly acquired by their defeat of the French in 1763. British efforts to create a more orderly empire exposed the limitations of centralized authority over the societies colonists had developed in North America. Beginning in 1763–64, the British Parliament enacted a series of taxes and other legislation with the intent of governing the North American colonies much more vigorously and directly. Yet the decade that followed revealed a very clear pattern. For the most part, even when colonists objected to them, Britain could enforce its laws on the ocean, but it could not do so inside the colonies unless it received the colonists' voluntary consent.⁷ The British navy brought a practical degree of power to British claims of sovereignty, but there was no equivalent to the navy on land so distant from central authority, and peopled by land-owning households that had come to expect a high degree of self-governance over their internal affairs. The escalating efforts of British policymakers to rule within North America by coercion and force revealed a *de facto* imperial federalism. British authority was quite real on the oceans and along the North American coastline, but was subject to the expectations and demands of British North Americans within their colonies. Recognition of the wide gulf between Parliament's ideas regarding sovereignty and imperial reality produced a conflict that proved irresolvable.

The imperial crisis that resulted in a war for independence occurred simultaneously with the rising tensions within colonial society, tensions fueled by anxieties over social and economic inequality and the challenges of gaining access to the land

and resources that underwrote household independence. In complex ways, these twin sets of conflicts—those among the residents of North America, and those between British North Americans and the British Empire—reinforced each other and meant that revolutionary efforts to achieve independence from Britain would also need to address the conflicts among the revolutionaries and between the revolutionaries and their Indian neighbors. Growing internal conflicts predated the imperial tensions. In addition, internal conflicts did not automatically lend themselves to denunciations of Britain or encourage colonial unity. After all, poorer and land-hungry colonists were not necessarily predisposed to admire or follow wealthier elites who were becoming critical of British policies in the 1760s and 1770s.

Yet the imperial tensions that arose after 1763 had a curious effect. Belief systems that explained British policies as part of an effort to diminish colonial liberty and limit opportunity in North America could have broad appeal.⁸ As the imperial crisis worsened, anti-British language and demands for independence were used by a variety of different people who expected the conflict they were participating in to address a variety of different concerns.⁹ The growing revolutionary conflict that provoked a war for independence created an extraordinary political situation where the normal course for redressing grievances and behaving in public was suspended, and where all sorts of people who would have had difficulty doing so before could thrust themselves into public space and air the grievances that mattered to them most.¹⁰

As the chapters by Kathleen DuVal and Alyssa Mt. Pleasant address, Indians had no reason to welcome the independence of the thirteen colonies. In general they sought to limit settler expansion while maintaining older alliances with European allies and, in the case of the Iroquois with the United States, forging new ones. At the same time, poorer colonists demanded that a new republican and revolutionary society address problems of inequality and dependence that they associated with land scarcity and speculation. Efforts to confront inequality among colonists almost always depended on getting access to more land. Indeed, soldiers in the Continental Army were often paid, in part, with promises of western lands. From the perspective of poorer colonists, what looked like a noble assault on inequality and the pursuit of a more just and equitable republican social order was, from the perspective of Indian country, a vicious and disgraceful land grab, a savage and ignoble act of dispossession.

The very complicated and messy social upheaval of the Revolution had a profound impact on slavery as well, as the wide-ranging chapters by Peter Onuf, John Craig Hammond, and Richard Newman explore. As with issues of independence, equality, and land, this impact was complex and often contradictory. Revolutionary statements and ideas were unquestionably an assault on established authority. American colonists-turned-republican-citizens claimed a right to judge the actions of government, and to violently overthrow it if it pervasively acted without the consent of the governed in ways that threatened life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. American revolutionaries sought to destroy an established order and to replace monarchy and aristocracy with a republic where no person possessed a birthright to govern. In order to justify such subversive behavior, revolutionaries had no choice but to place powerful and slippery words at the heart of their effort: words such as liberty, equality, and freedom. These words were slippery because their definitions were elusive and difficult to limit to just one meaning. In a revolutionary movement that relied on print and a great deal of public speech to persuade and to spread its intentions, such

words were capable of traveling far and in unanticipated directions. These words could slide from their origins and be appropriated by all sorts of people who could reinterpret them and make use of them based on their own particular needs, conditions, and circumstances.¹¹

Richard Newman's and James Alexander Dun's chapters invite us to imagine the impact on a society that increasingly relied on slavery of the fact that it chose to place such words at the heart of its political culture, and to place the concepts and ideals those words represented in prominent places in its seminal revolutionary statements and documents. Revolutionary ideas made slavery a problem in ways it had not been before.¹² Slaves had long resisted their enslavement. But the American Revolution provided a universalizing language that put the burden of proof on those who wished to defend slavery. Revolutionary ideas and ideals provoked the question, Could a society that prized liberty, equality, and freedom also enslave? If it could, why could it do so? Those were questions that became impossible to avoid as a result of the Revolution.

The effects of the American Revolution exposed and intensified a host of conflicted concerns that had developed during the eighteenth century. As Nicole Eustace's chapter explores, the Revolution brought forth a charged and highly emotional language and a cultural sensibility of expectation that the republican, revolutionary society should be a freer and a better society, one where people were much more equal, refined, and civil, as well as able to define their aspirations and needs while possessing the means to pursue them. Yet, what the revolutionary experience and revolutionary ideals could not clearly address was how all of these expectations could mediate the incompatible plans held by native peoples and new republican citizens for the land that both groups lived on. The revolutionary experience also could not clearly show how slaves, slave owners, and those who were neither would coexist in a world that embraced both slavery and revolutionary ideals. Finally, though the revolutionary experience produced the ideal that republican citizens should be much more equal to each other than they had been during the late colonial period, precisely how to accomplish this objective also remained elusive and unclear.

As Allan Kulikoff's chapter demonstrates, the American Revolution was an economic catastrophe in practical and material terms for many small farmers and laborers. The war caused a great deal more poverty and inequality in the final quarter of the eighteenth century than colonists had experienced prior to the Revolution. Many small property holders and laborers found themselves slipping backwards economically between 1775 and 1800, provoking a series of armed, agrarian rebellions from the mid 1780s to the late 1790s, most notably in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. During the 1790s, when the polity and the nation's finances stabilized under the new Constitution and Alexander Hamilton's financial system, the benefits remained quite unevenly distributed and contributed to greater inequality, not less.¹³

Yet, as Max Edling's chapter discusses, the achievements of men such as Alexander Hamilton during the 1790s also pointed towards one solution to the thorny and complex challenges produced by revolutionary upheaval. The national government that resulted with ratification of the Constitution had immense authority to tax, borrow, mobilize the nation's resources, and make use of military power.¹⁴ Such a national state would have been unthinkable in 1776 when the colonies had rejected the British state model and replaced it, by 1781, with the highly decentralized Articles

of Confederation. That government could not tax without a great deal of assistance from the states. Yet many citizens of the young republic felt that they could benefit from the new national government the Constitution had created. On paper, the new government could do much more to pursue the nation's claims in the west, defend republican institutions from state enemies, particularly monarchies, and protect itself from those it declared law-breakers, who might potentially threaten private property. During the 1790s, the new national government acted decisively against two armed uprisings in Pennsylvania, something the Articles of Confederation government had been in no position to do during Shays Rebellion in 1786.

However, as James Alexander Dun's chapter explains, during the complicated and divisive 1790s, Europe and parts of the Caribbean blew up in war and revolution, and the revolutionary American Republic's continued commitment to slavery was exposed in sharp relief by the dramatic West Indian emancipations that began when slaves and free people of color turned the French colony of Saint Domingue into the republic of Haiti. Politics in the new nation grew intensely polarized during the 1790s, as the revolutions throughout the Atlantic World produced conflicting reactions in the United States. In part in reaction to international revolutionary tumult, the Federalist Party headed by President Washington sought to build a republican version of the fiscal-military state imitative of the British model, one that could govern much more decisively and effectively in an age of violent revolution and emancipation. Yet the Federalists' forceful actions, particularly the financial policies of Alexander Hamilton, contributed greatly to domestic political conflict and division. Hamilton's policies regarding the public debt incurred while fighting the revolutionary war rewarded those who had speculated in government debts, often at the expense of revolutionary war veterans and smaller producers who supplied the war effort. These policies exacerbated frustrations when small holders and laborers were already suffering dramatic economic reversals.¹⁵

Yet national policies did not solely produce conflict and division during the 1790s. The Constitution did provide the new national government with the means to much more forcefully respond to pressing issues and concerns. In the mid-1790s, the national government was able to demonstrate the power that came with greater consolidation and the capacity to tax and borrow. In 1794, the army led by General Anthony Wayne defeated an Indian resistance in the west that had begun even before the French and Indian War and that had never truly subsided. The defeat suggested one solution to the problem of inequality within republican society: inequality among citizen heads of household within the Republic might very well be lessened by continual access to land seized from Indians.

Yet, the same national government that could improve the Republic's ability to dispossess Indians also appeared to many to be too centralized, too dangerously powerful. That government enacted tax policies that rewarded speculators in the public funds while it alienated many artisans who received no relief from the relentless competition of imported British manufactures. Under the Federalist Party, the new national government also took a hostile stance towards immigrants, particularly the Irish, especially if they appeared to support international efforts to promote revolution and the overthrow of monarchy and aristocracy.¹⁶ Thomas Jefferson and many of his supporters saw tremendous possibility in the French revolutionary efforts violently to export republican institutions. Alexander Hamilton and many other

Federalists instead saw chaos, anarchy, destruction, and disorder. In the late 1790s, the Federalist Party vastly increased the size of the army—to use against the citizenry, its critics charged. It also passed laws that cracked down on speech critical of the government, that greatly lengthened the period of naturalization necessary for citizenship, and that made it much easier to deport non-citizens.¹⁷ For citizens of the revolutionary American Republic, the 1790s laid bare the possibilities and the dangers that came with a much more powerful and active national government and nation-state. On the one hand, it was essential for realizing national ambitions in the west. On the other, it could enact and enforce policies that reminded many far too much of Britain's vast fiscal state and military apparatus: high taxes, a significant public debt, a robust financial system with a national bank, and a large standing army, potentially to be used to reinforce laws that limited dissent.

The solution that emerged after Thomas Jefferson's presidential victory in 1800 was impressive in its simplicity and effectiveness, and to a remarkable degree it followed the *de facto* imperial federalism that had developed naturally in the eighteenth-century British Empire. Unlike imperial policymakers, who sought to overcome and master powerful, organic federal realities, the Jeffersonians accepted them as the foundation of a republican polity. Beginning with Jefferson's presidency, and, for the most part, continuing through the 1840s, citizens of the Republic reconstituted the national government so that it could vigorously pursue what was largely consensual and desirable. But citizens also greatly restricted the national government. They made sure that it could not act on or intervene in those areas where its actions were most likely to be unwelcomed by the citizens it was acting upon, or were likely to produce conflict among citizens or between the regions that collectively comprised the nation.

As the chapters by Peter Onuf and Reeve Huston explore, after 1800, the Democratic-Republican Party led by Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe, who served as presidents from 1801 through 1824, created a lasting political culture that made westward expansion a top priority. The Democratic-Republicans connected westward expansion through a powerful ideological elixir to promises of freedom and independence for citizens of the Republic.¹⁸ Yet, as the essays by Onuf and John Craig Hammond discuss, the Democratic-Republicans also took a path of least resistance that thoroughly enmeshed westward expansion with the expansion of slavery.

At the same time, the Democratic-Republicans also greatly reduced the public debt until the War of 1812, and then resumed reducing it until, under President Andrew Jackson, the debt was entirely retired in the early 1830s. Prior to the War of 1812, the public debt had been cut in half (despite the purchase of the Louisiana territory). The Democratic-Republicans managed this frugality even though, except for a brief period during the War of 1812, they eradicated all internal taxation and limited the national government's taxing power to light duties on foreign imports. After 1800, citizens rarely encountered their national government as a tax collector.

The impulses to make a national government that would act decisively and with great power outside the borders of each state in the union (in the west and, when necessary, on the oceans), while rarely interfering with the citizenry inside the nation's borders, came from both below and above. From below, the experience of the 1790s showed how difficult it was for the new government to act upon citizens who did not wish to provide voluntary consent. The armed rebellions resisting internal taxation

during the 1790s were only the most visible and spectacular examples of citizens physically preventing various governing agents from governing them in their localities. Actions ranging from blockading roads into villages, to disrupting auctions to sell the goods of the foreclosed and dispossessed, to interfering with judicial proceedings demonstrated that governance in the interior of the Republic could only occur if citizens allowed themselves to be governed. When it came to the national government, the governance citizens would allow within their state borders, or indeed even in territories under the dominion of the national government, was in fact very little.¹⁹

The strict limits on the power of the national government were made clear to Presidents Jefferson and Madison. Both Presidents wanted a much quicker westward expansion than the Federalist Party had desired, but they also wanted the process to be overseen by agents of the national government, both civilian and military.²⁰ They wanted the process, when it involved the nation's European imperial neighbors, to be carried out by those agents via diplomatic channels. In addition to preferring the national government to manage the nation's foreign policy on the North American continent, Jefferson and his then Secretary of State Madison were initially also quite interested in curtailing, even preventing, slavery in the Louisiana Purchase territory, whose expansion rubbed raw the contradictions between the ideals of the Revolution and the nation's practices.²¹

All of their ambitions for the process of westward expansion depended on successfully convincing citizens in the distant interior of the nation to share their vision for the west and to follow the leadership they hoped to provide. Yet, the years from 1803 to 1816 (the end of Madison's presidency) showed that the national government could not expect to impose truly unpopular policies on its citizens. As Reeve Huston's chapter explores, national policy regarding land and westward expansion often began at the margins, on the nation's borders. Settlers regularly took matters into their own hands, provoking violent confrontations that forced the national government to protect and provide for them in ways it would not have done had they not forced the issue. President Madison came to understand this process of national policy driven by the people at the margins very well. When diplomacy did not appear to be securing Florida and the lands of the Gulf Coast that became Mississippi and Alabama fast enough, citizens invaded those regions with private armies despite his strong objections. In some cases, private "filibusters," as they were called, were aided by officers of the United States army, by either disobeying or pretending not to have received orders. Governors of neighboring states also lent their state militias.²²

By the same token, the national government could do nothing to prevent citizens' determination to make Louisiana part of the Republic's slave country. Slavery had existed in Louisiana prior to the purchase, and slaveholders already present, and those who streamed in afterwards, had every intention of keeping and bringing slaves into such promising territory. Rather than try to stop them, the Jefferson administration quickly acquiesced and dropped any limitations on slavery in the territory. Doing anything else would have run the risk of exposing just how little authority national policymakers had to make citizens do things that policymakers identified as desirable, but that a sizeable portion of the citizenry affected by the policy truly did not want. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the national government often retreated from challenging, or elected not to challenge, its citizens within national

borders. By making this choice, national statesmen exposed how little they could govern within the nation, and especially within the borders of the states, when citizens did not support national initiatives.

But the national government could act quite decisively within the areas of policy where its actions were largely popular and enjoyed the voluntary consent of a large portion of the citizenry, particularly among those groups most affected by the actions taken. A prime example was seizing land from Indians and expanding the nation's borders to the west. Here the confrontations leading to the War of 1812 and the war itself, the most challenging events of Jefferson's and Madison's presidencies, were highly significant. Traditionally, scholars have emphasized issues and conflicts on the Atlantic Ocean when discussing the war: free trade, impressment, and British and French spoliation of American shipping.²³ Historians are right to emphasize these issues, which had a great deal to do with the coming of war. But, as Alan Taylor's essay explores, much of the war was fought on and for the North American continent. When the impact of the war on the struggle for the continent is placed front and center, it becomes clear that the War of 1812 had a decisive outcome that dramatically changed the status quo *ante bellum*.²⁴

The War of 1812 decisively resolved a major question produced by the American Revolution: Who would control the land between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River? As a result of the war, Indians lost access to Britain as an ally and had to give up hope of preventing the Republic's hegemony east of the Mississippi River. In the South, the war consolidated once and for all the Republic's control of the Gulf Coast region west of Florida and allowed the United States to acquire Florida during the next decade. In the decade after the war, the Gulf Coast region became states in the Union or territories belonging to it. The War of 1812 also fundamentally reshaped the context in which the three questions left unresolved by the Revolution would continue to be addressed. First, how would citizens within the Republic deal with the economic inequality within American society that so many believed threatened republican values and institutions and that the Revolution had done very little to lessen? Second, how would citizens of the Republic and Indians negotiate their mutually exclusive claims to western lands? And third, how would slaves, slave owners, and free non-slaveholders negotiate the conflicts between revolutionary ideals and the practices of so many citizens?

The years between 1801 and 1812 had seen a great deal of political conflict within the United States, and especially among the followers of Jefferson, regarding how best to respond to concerns about economic inequality. In the decade before the war, there were many calls to take decisions about property disputes away from the courts and from the politically insulated judiciary. Many supporters of Jefferson demanded that decisions be placed in the hands of more democratic legislatures and locally chosen arbitrators, who were more likely to be responsive to the perceptions of local community concerning just outcomes.²⁵ As Jason Opal's chapter explores, such demands continued after the war. But in the post-war period, a broad consensus among political elites and many property holders emerged on this issue. This consensus included both Henry Clay and Andrew Jackson, who would dominate national politics in the 1820s and 1830s. Clay and Jackson were bitterly opposed to allowing popular decision-making about private rights and usages of property.

Instead of enacting potentially disruptive proposals that might interfere with citizens' property-rights claims, seizing western land became the cure for economic inequality and the means of allaying concerns that the dependence of some citizens on the wealth and resources of others would undermine republican institutions. The War of 1812 ensured that the full power of the Republic's nation-state could and would be used to dispossess Indians. There would certainly be some dissent, and the worst examples of mistreatment, such as the forced removal of the Cherokee on the Trail of Tears, always found critics of conscience within the Republic.²⁶ But in a republican polity where the national government could govern vigorously and decisively in the interior only if it enjoyed popular consent, especially in the specific area where it hoped to carry out a particular policy, it was clear that a majority of citizens wanted to see Indians dispossessed. That desire grew stronger the closer to the disputed lands that one lived. Indians could and did fight back, but the anti-Indian alliance between the federal government and local citizens that was consolidated by the War of 1812 ensured that they would fight against ever-increasing odds.

The War of 1812 also clarified that the issue of slavery would largely be determined by the same political realities that governed where the nation-state could either act decisively or would need to conform to the wishes of localities and regions. The war laid open vast new lands desirable for slavery. As in the Louisiana Purchase territory a decade earlier, the vast majority of settlers were either determined to bring slaves into the territory, or were not as committed to preventing it as those who wanted slavery were to spreading it.

At the same time that slave owners were continuing to relentlessly spread slavery west, statesmen such as Clay, John Quincy Adams, and John C. Calhoun sought after the war to redress problems the war had exposed. In particular, they felt that the United States had performed badly during war time at properly funding and supplying the army and navy. In addition, they and other National Republicans, as this group came to be called, feared that the post-1815 world would see a rapid global decline in demand for American agriculture. This prospect necessitated creating a greater demand for American agricultural surplus inside the United States. Greater demand required more non-agricultural producers and a more diverse internal economy of agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing. National Republicans also reasoned that rising slave production of raw materials could find a steady and reliable market with the growth of domestic manufacturing in New England and the West.²⁷

National Republicans believed that addressing the weaknesses that the war had exposed, and promoting a more diverse domestic economy, required decisive action by the national government. Between 1816 and 1820, Congress enacted high tariffs to discourage foreign imports and to encourage domestic manufactures, rechartered a national bank to facilitate commerce and credit and more reliable paper currencies, and championed road and canal construction.²⁸ This "American System," as Henry Clay named it, would combine with steady westward expansion to provide citizens plentiful land and resources, as well as the credit and markets that would allow them to bring those resources to their full productive potential.²⁹

Yet the American System required the national government to act vigorously and decisively in ways that violated the terms on which the citizenry was generally comfortable with it acting. Chartering a national bank reminded many people of the

Federalist Party of the 1790s. The American System was also bolstered by a series of Supreme Court decisions that strengthened the judiciary at the expense of the popularly elected House of Representatives at the national level, and the state legislatures more locally.³⁰ In addition, much of the ambitious program, particularly with internal improvements (the term for road and canal-building), depended on looser and more creative readings of the Constitution, since the Constitution did not explicitly grant the national government the power to charter the corporations that would undertake their construction.

The post-war plans of the National Republicans, then, did not produce the broad consensus necessary for the national government to act vigorously upon citizens, especially within their own states' borders. In response, many who wished for more local control of policymaking, or who feared rapid and potentially dislocating change, higher land prices, and rising taxes began to assert states' rights to control decision-making within their states. Advocates of states' rights denied that the national government could behave so boldly and expansively.³¹

The constitutional argument, which was enmeshed with questions provoked by the American Revolution concerning issues of equality and the distribution of power and authority, also became entangled with the issue of slavery and its expansion. Slavery's westward expansion was clear well before the War of 1812.³² Yet the decisive outcome the war brought in the interior of the continent made it clear that slavery would grow significantly, while also remaining intensely regional. When thinking simply about a desirable economy, the American System had much to offer slaveholders, who needed steady and growing markets, reliable credit, and methods of transport. But, to a great extent, they could like the domestic economy the American System promised without liking the national government that was required to build it. The American System needed a national government and a method of constitutional interpretation that allowed two things: first, a creative and expansive interpretation of the Constitution that would allow national governing power to develop in ways that were unpredictable and open-ended; and second, a willingness to tolerate a great deal of decision-making about localities at the national level, and so at a great distance from the locations where decisions would take effect.

Both prospects were frightening to many slaveholders. At least in theory, the national government that National Republicans needed would have allowed lawmakers who did not own slaves or live in slave states to make decisions that could affect conditions in slave regions. To those who interpreted the Constitution more strictly, and who argued that it limited the power of the national government only to what the Constitution explicitly granted to it, claims that the national government could charter corporations were especially frightening. Nowhere did the Constitution expressly grant such a power. If that power could be read into the document, what other powers could be? Slave owners understood that the only thing that kept the enslaved in slavery were the laws declaring them and their descendants to be slaves. Those laws were not found explicitly in the Constitution either; and they were not enacted by the national government. Those laws, and the hundreds of necessary supporting statutes, had been enacted by slave state legislatures. To truly protect slavery, slaveholders were certain that they needed to keep control over the political institutions that made men and women slaves. It was much safer to insist that the national government was limited in its power, confined to specific areas of governance,

and to denounce expansive interpretations of the Constitution that might allow statesmen at the national level to interfere with conditions and arrangements in local communities. After all, insisted North Carolina Congressman Nathaniel Macon, “examine the Constitution of the U.S. . . . and then tell me if Congress can establish banks, make roads and canals, whether they cannot free all the slaves in the U.S.” For Macon it was pointless to deny that “If Congress can make canals, they can with more propriety emancipate.”³³

Slave owners were not the only group concerned about the American System. During the 1820s, a broad and interregional coalition of citizens embraced the idea of states’ rights. Much of this coalition could support roads, canals, and banks as long as they oversaw at the state level the processes that built and chartered them. While northern advocates of states’ rights had much less direct interest in protecting slave property, they felt real concerns about the implications of National Republican policy for themselves. States’ rights allowed them to challenge the American System. It also provided a highly effective method of constitutional interpretation, and a political program, that insulated localities and regions from national policies they did not like and from arguments for national governing power that might interfere with local interests and arrangements. States’ rights, then, represented an ideal belief system for insulating local interests and allowing them to flourish. It is difficult to imagine a better system for protecting slaveholders, a group with immense power, but particularly within a specific region.

The ideology of states’ rights fit neatly within the political solution that had emerged from the American Revolution regarding the legitimate uses of national power: as vigorous as necessary to accomplish policy priorities when they were broadly popular and consensual; and much more confined and limited when those conditions could not be met. Between 1828 and 1840, Presidents Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, the leaders of the new Democratic Party that had formed in the 1820s around the charismatic Jackson, occupied this political solution nearly completely. Led by Jackson, the Democratic Party dismantled the American System by dissolving the national bank, by gradually lowering tariffs below protective levels, and by removing the national government from the business of supporting internal improvements within states. At the same time, the Democrats under Jackson aggressively used the national government where doing so was popular across regions and could achieve local consent, as was the case with removal of the Cherokee from their rich and desirable lands in the southeast.³⁴

The Democrats understood that citizens were not simply for, or against, a strong national government. Rather, vigorous use of power had to fit within a national political culture very much defined by regional and state loyalty, states’ rights, and the need for popular consent. Nevertheless, there was a highly acceptable place for national power in those areas where citizens clearly expected their national government to act, such as facilitating westward expansion and protecting the authority expressly granted to the national government by the Constitution. Thus Jackson responded highly aggressively to South Carolina’s claim in 1831 that it could nullify a highly protective tariff.³⁵ That claim challenged the right expressly granted to Congress to lay and collect taxes. Though Jackson and the Congress threatened South Carolina with force, the Nullification Crisis was also reminiscent of Jefferson’s acquiescence to slavery in the Louisiana Purchase territory. While threatening force,

Jackson also participated in the brokering of a deal that lowered the tariff, removing South Carolina's need to nullify it. South Carolina continued to claim the right to nullify, and indeed nullified the federal law authorizing the use of force, a symbolic gesture since the reason to use force no longer existed. This solution of sorts to the Nullification Crisis suggested that Jackson did not want to find out precisely what the national government's power actually was in a locality where it would have to govern almost solely with force and without local consent.

The Democrats in the 1830s and 1840s argued that limiting the power of the nation-state to appropriate areas—essentially removing Indians and acquiring more land for citizens—and leaving most fiscal and banking policy and internal improvements to the states, would produce desired social and economic equality.³⁶ In essence, the Democrats insisted that equality for white male citizens did not require the sorts of potentially redistributive outcomes that could come from inflationary paper money or debt relief laws. Such policies smacked of interference with property rights. Instead, equality would come from the simultaneous limiting and expanding of the nation-state's power. It would be limited as the national government abandoned the American System, which the Democrats viewed as an artificial parceling out of privileges to favored bankers and investors in internal improvements corporations. It would be expanded because whenever citizens supported it, the Democrats would use the national government to seize land from Indians and provide opportunities for citizens to acquire it. Expansion would make divisive policies such as relief laws unnecessary.³⁷

The Democrats' commitment meant that regions and localities were largely left alone to develop on their own. There was no shortage of banking and construction of internal improvements in the twenty years after Jackson's first election, but almost all of this economic development was overseen by state governments.³⁸ The same conditions allowed slavery to flourish. Under the Democrats, the dominant interests within regions were not interfered with, and initiatives enjoying broad local support benefitted greatly. Slave states chartered banks and spent on internal improvements, too; but they did so free from the anxieties that the constitutional defense of the American System had provoked.³⁹

The decades after Jackson's election produced a frenzied, largely uncontrolled, and undirected pursuit of opportunities and wealth, which provoked sharp criticism from certain quarters.⁴⁰ As the chapters by Emily Conroy-Krutz and Richard Newman explain, moral reform movements spread during the 1820s and 1830s as many people criticized the forcible removal of Indians, the expansion of slavery, and a host of social ills associated with rapid economic change and dislocation. Moral reformers drew on transatlantic evangelical moral commitments and revulsion over slavery, as well as abstract revolutionary ideals and notions of citizenship. They were heavily influenced by international evangelical imperatives to seek out the best version of each person, regardless of origin or skin color, and to implore them to more righteous behavior. Abolitionists, advocates for Indians, and moral reformers in general provided an alternative, for anyone who desired one, to many of the predominant impulses of American culture. Between 1828 and 1840, this counter-cultural impulse had less impact on national priorities than did the Democratic Party. But it did provide a coherent language, particularly in its opposition to slavery, which was easier to ignore than refute. If there were to come a time when a growing number

of the Republic's citizens found themselves becoming concerned about the actions of slave owners, and should those citizens suddenly wish to learn more about slavery, abolitionists would be well positioned to educate them and to focus their anxieties. But prior to the mid-1840s, antislavery advocates of all descriptions were primarily teachers without students.⁴¹

Few northern Democrats in the 1830s believed that slaveholders had caused the dearth of opportunities for white men or rendered equality elusive for such citizens. Opportunity and equality would come with states' rights, dismantling the American System, and seizure of Indian lands. The profound problem of the 1830s and 1840s, though, was that these policies did not provide the outcome they promised. At the end of Jackson's two terms in office, in 1837, equality for white male citizens seemed more distant than ever.

The trauma inflicted by the Panics of 1837 and 1839—to that point the worst depression in the nation's history—reinforced the global connections of the American states' economies. American citizens had made it impossible for their national government to provide a nationally minded fiscal policy or approach to internal improvements and economic development.⁴² As a result, states acted in uncoordinated and unchecked fashion. They chartered banks and internal improvement corporations at a dizzying pace, and invented new financial instruments to securitize debt and enable the purchase of massive numbers of slaves and acres of land. States and private citizens borrowed heavily on the international money markets, especially from the British, and kept state taxes low by running up debt under the assumption that developmental projects would eventually pay for themselves and provide enough profits to repay initial investments. Economic boom in the 1830s was precarious and subject to international developments, decisions, and fluctuations that were critical to the lives of American citizens, though few of them realized that or understood why. The Panic of 1837 (which became truly disastrous in 1839) was sparked by rapid credit contraction beginning with the Bank of England. The bank raised interest rates in fearful response to vast capital outflows to the United States. These outflows resulted as British investors took advantage of cheap credit and bought up the states' bonds and the stock of state banks expecting to benefit from continued boom conditions. The sudden rise in interest rates resulted in a cascading disappearance of capital and then credit, default on debts, bankruptcies, repudiation of bonds by state legislatures, bank failures, failed projects both public and private, and growing desperation, which reinforced how global developments and imperatives continued to dramatically affect U.S. domestic conditions and events.⁴³

In the United States economic collapse began a process of realignment in consciousness and politics. Hard economic times lasted well into the 1840s, affecting tens of thousands of families and provoking severe social tensions, especially in northern cities.⁴⁴ Social conflict in the North produced charges and counter charges. Advocates of banks, internal improvements, and rapid economic development were accused of undermining republican values and institutions by greedily pursuing their own interests at the expense of the needs of the larger community. Yet successful businessmen, entrepreneurs, investors, and commercially oriented landowners, as well as others who associated the nation's needs with the growth of banking and internal improvements, argued that they were in fact creating a society of opportunity and uplift where the sober, thrifty, and industrious could benefit, could better themselves, and so could participate in a collective process that improved the fortunes and moral tone of the Republic.⁴⁵

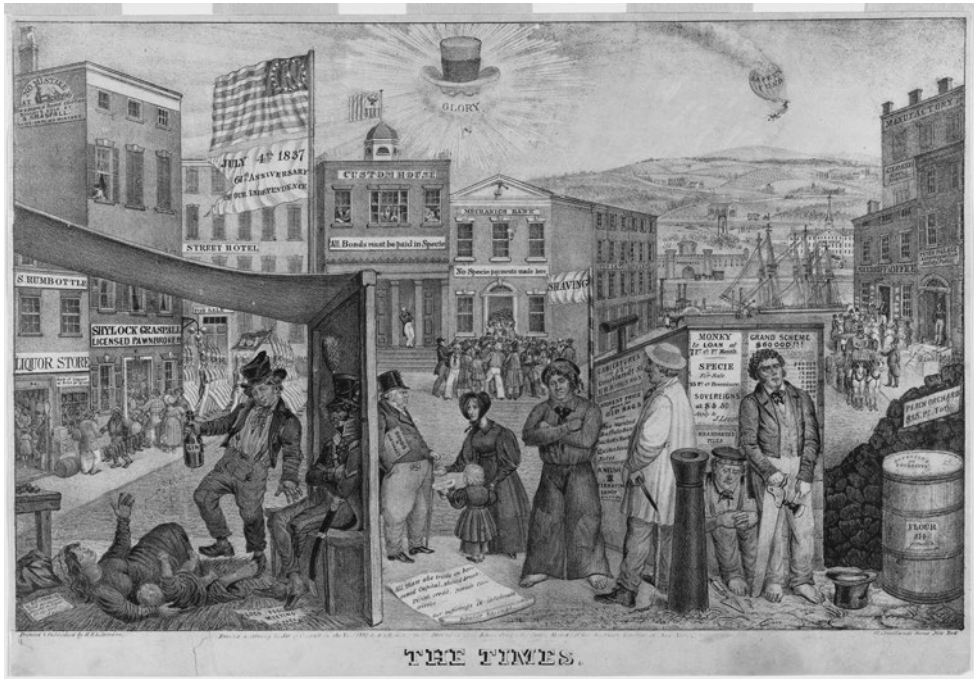


Figure 1.1 This 1837 print conveys the deteriorating social conditions and despair produced by the Panic of 1837. While drunkards stagger in the streets and a mob masses in front of a bank in the background, a mother with her child beside her begs a creditor for mercy. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ds-04507.

As Emily Conroy-Krutz's chapter discusses, this political economy and culture of opportunity and uplift fit well with a zeal for moral reform: with support for temperance, opposition to gambling and prostitution, and even, increasingly, for abolition. Challenges to this world view from within northern society, which came from those injured by the raucous economy of boom and bust, and which were rendered more acute by the Panic years, led to a much more consistent defense of the political economy and culture of opportunity and uplift. As many middle-class northerners defended their actions and values, they also produced a climate that encouraged people to pay more attention to slavery.

For, as Richard Newman's chapter explains, the social conditions of slavery were, in many ways, a point-by-point negation of the political economy and culture of opportunity and uplift. This world view, most readily associated with the northern middle class, placed at the heart of desirable and responsible republican society a temperate, abstemious, stable family in which loving parents taught well-cared-for and cherished children. Such an ideal was challenging to accomplish for many living in northern states that were battered by the Panic and, even before it, that had been buffeted by complex and rapid economic change. But such an ideal, abolitionist literature poignantly and graphically argued, was virtually impossible in the slave

South. Abolitionist pamphlets and the narratives of escaped slaves regularly depicted families broken apart and sold, parents brutally beaten before their children, and drunken and lascivious masters treating female slaves (and mothers) abominably. As middle-class northerners felt the need to more actively defend their values and actions against the denunciations of workingmen's advocates, critics of banking, and those hostile to moral reform in general, they more vociferously championed a set of values, a way of thinking and behaving, that was impossible to reconcile with a world of slavery, a world that appeared to be an abomination against republican values and godly devotion.⁴⁶

Hard times after 1837 only intensified the drive to seize Indian lands, and the cry of Manifest Destiny, the assertion that it was the nation's right to spread its borders to the Pacific Ocean, profoundly shaped the 1840s. By 1846, Manifest Destiny met the criteria that allowed for decisive action by the nation-state. Enough citizens in both North and South believed that rapid expansion into the West was the answer to their problems. This belief provided the consent necessary for vigorous, even violent, action by the national government. Decisive use of the national government, in this case to seize western lands, would not be visited upon citizens or take place within existing states' borders, which meant it would take place in the arena where citizens usually tolerated powerful intervention by the national state. In 1844 and 1845, Presidents John Tyler and James K. Polk oversaw the voluntary annexation of Texas into the union, with Texas's claiming a southern border guaranteed to provoke war with Mexico. President Polk had run as a Manifest Destiny candidate, and the declaration of war in 1846 seemed a fulfillment of the aspirations of a broad cross section of the Republic.

But westward expansion also meant the expansion of slavery. The chapters by Matthew Karp and Michael Morrison explain that, in response to what some could depict as the implosion of the free labor economy, and in reaction to the intensifying critique of slavery, advocates for slavery began ever more aggressively to promote slavery and its expansion. Slaveholders argued that free labor was a failed experiment that created social and economic inequality among white citizens, and that slave states were the true repositories of American revolutionary ideals. The years after the Panic were quite charged. Sharp denunciations of slavery, which had been made since the Revolution, and that had intensified throughout the 1830s, found more listeners. A growing northern audience for antislavery ideas encouraged, in reaction, a much more strident and amplified justification of slavery and its expansion. This conflict, crucially, took place while the nation was aggressively moving west and seizing more land by occupation, annexation, and finally by declaring war.

Rapid expansion coming in the aftermath of hard times was a potent brew. In the north it produced the free soil movement and eventually the Republican Party. This political development provided a way for a great many northerners, including former supporters of Jackson, who tended to blame the Panic of 1837 on those subscribing to the political economy and culture of opportunity and uplift, to express concerns about slavery spreading west. Many northern former supporters of Jackson, facing terrible economic conditions despite the implementing of Jacksonian policies, looked to western lands as the solution. They feared that farming families would not get the resources they desperately needed if the land was claimed by wealthy and powerful slaveholders.⁴⁷

At the same time that many former northern supporters of Jackson began to focus on keeping slavery out of the west, advocates for free soil such as Abraham Lincoln, a former supporter of Clay, and a staunch opponent of Jackson, began to argue that social and economic inequality in the north did not result from the personal failings of the destitute or the actions of the successful. Rather, a superior society of opportunity, freedom, uplift, thrift, and sobriety was stymied by the ugly world of slavery. Slavery produced debauchery, helplessness, laziness, profligacy, and stagnation. It degraded labor, brutalized laborers, and so held republican virtues in contempt. But worse still, and of necessary concern even for those citizens who cared nothing about the slaves themselves, this system was spreading west and gobbling up resources that should instead have gone to hard-working republican citizens. Free soil advocates argued that as a result of slavery's expansion, far too many citizens lived in poverty. Their difficulties were due primarily to the seizure of resources by an indefensible system of exploitation and privilege that was seeking to spread wherever it could, and directly at their expense.⁴⁸

The argument for free soil, denying slavery's expansion and making cheap (and possibly even free) western land available for free laborers, was profoundly compelling. So too was the argument that a "slave power," a group committed to advancing the interests of slave owners regardless of the consequences, was tightening its grip on the nation's political institutions.⁴⁹ The free soil critique was not in fact an adequate analysis of the complex sources of inequality and the concentration of wealth in northern states.⁵⁰ But it was also not wrong to insist that the vast western lands had the potential to provide productive resources to struggling laborers, and to raise the wages of those who remained in the east as others moved west. Once again, seizure of Indian lands was the primary means for promoting equality among republican citizens, while avoiding asking divisive questions about root sources of inequality, or promoting redistributive policies that would alter existing property arrangements within the Republic.

In a process discussed carefully by Michael Morrison's chapter, the nation's political parties reorganized between 1848 and 1854 along sectional lines. In the North, free soil could attract former supporters of Jackson, such as his own Vice President and then Presidential successor Martin Van Buren, who ran for president once again in 1848 as the candidate of the Free Soil Party. When the free soil critique was folded into the new Republican Party in the early 1850s, it could also attract former American System men and Henry Clay supporters such as Abraham Lincoln, who had been a bitter opponent of the Democratic Party that Martin Van Buren had helped to found.

The Republican Party could begin to unify northerners across social class divisions around the commitment to preventing the spread of slavery beyond its current borders and into the west. As the Democratic Party increasingly lost northern support to the Republicans, it came to be dominated by proslavery southerners. While some northerners remained Democrats, the Democrats were primarily the party of the South and slavery by the mid-1850s. This rapid political realignment along sectional lines, with the Republican Party seeking to keep slavery contained within the states where it already existed, and the Democratic Party demanding that slavery be allowed to spread everywhere, or at least into those areas where a majority wanted it, was a crucial result of the war with Mexico.⁵¹

Manifest Destiny, the war with Mexico, and the political realignment of the 1850s resulted from three distinct impulses, and each impulse was capable of producing a different coalition of supporters. The first was simply the commitment to westward expansion. That impulse attracted broad, interregional support. Many middle-class northerners devoted to the political economy of opportunity and uplift supported westward expansion, seeking to spread a morally superior society and culture while alleviating northern social tensions, and while also limiting the spread of slavery. Many northern laborers and those alienated by hard times could also support westward expansion as they began to accept free-soil arguments that presented the west as essential for their chance to achieve independence and equality.

In the South, slaveholders were committed to spreading slavery west, and became only more so as they began to champion it as the basis for a superior system of labor that could best preserve republican institutions. Planters longed for Texas, Cuba, and much more, and, as Matthew Karp's essay explains, they confidently believed that they were producing the essential raw material of the industrial nineteenth century's global economy in the only way that it could reliably be produced.⁵² Meanwhile, white southerners who did not own slaves (the largest single group in the South) viewed the post-Panic conditions with deep anxiety. Many found compelling the argument that a world of racial slavery insulated them from the northern condition often described as "wage slavery." These masters of small worlds, as one historian has called them, did not experience the same degree of rapid and often dislocating social and economic change that northern laborers and small farmers had.⁵³ One did not need to own slaves to believe that one's fortunes were connected to those of slave owners. And slaveholders argued unceasingly that slavery required westward expansion.⁵⁴

A broad, interregional coalition, then, could form around the first impulse, which made it possible to use the tremendous coercive power of the nation-state—in the form of war with Mexico—to achieve what a great many claimed as their manifest destiny. The war absolutely had its critics, but the forces seeking war fit too fully and too well within the traditional arguments for the use of state power, as well as the traditional solutions for how citizens protected and pursued their most vital interests and aspirations.⁵⁵ Yet the power of the national government and the strength of the republican nation-state so clearly in evidence in the decisive victory over Mexico and the seizure of so much western land, in fact revealed just how fragile the union and its national institutions truly were. The drive to seize western land allowed the national government to mobilize the nation's resources. But they could be mobilized not because the national government could count on regularly directing those resources or governing states and regions, but rather because the various states and regions that comprised the union, due to profoundly different and mutually exclusive motives, all wanted to achieve westward expansion. For a brief period, they could all agree to make use of the national government as their convenient instrument. For only as long as the ambition remained straightforward—the seizure of western land—victory in war could paper over deep fissures. Those fissures divided citizens within regions. The effort to understand and ameliorate intra-regional tensions and conflicts produced explanations for them that focused recognition of the profound disagreements between regions regarding the place and future of slavery in the Republic. Victory in war, and the successful seizure of western land, decisively

accomplished the first impulse: the nation had expanded west. Acting on this impulse quickly produced two additional competing ones: the efforts to make the west either slave or free soil. That question was asked during the war when David Wilmot, Pennsylvania Congressman and former supporter of Jackson, called for slavery to be banned in all land taken from Mexico.

Over the next decade and half the nation broke apart over issues that began with conflict about slavery moving west. By the mid-1850s, even distributing land that formerly belonged to Indians, the one action taken by the national government that had always enjoyed interregional support, could only produce conflict between slavery and free soil. One of the few things the national government had always been able to do was give away Indian land. By the mid-1850s, it could no longer even peacefully accomplish that. The remnant of northern Democrats urged that the authority to determine slavery in the west be ceded to those who settled there, an idea given a brief life in the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. But as the Dred Scot Decision and the bloodshed in Kansas showed, the notion to risk the outcome of slavery on the decision of western settlers had become insupportable to the majority of Democrats and Republicans. The nearly universal rejection by the late 1850s of Stephen Douglas's "popular sovereignty" was symptomatic of the disintegration of the conditions that had allowed the national government to intervene decisively when doing so enjoyed both broad, interregional support and local consent. Increasingly, over the course of the 1850s, there was no matter of significance able to meet those conditions, and so political coalitions in both North and South sought control of the national government to impose their will on each other. The question of whether the west should be free soil produced and cemented the sectional realignment of politics and the conflict that brought the nation created by the revolutionary generation to a shockingly violent civil war.

Neither position offered anything of value to the western and plains Indians, who did all they could to resist this latest assault.⁵⁶ Yet the Civil War was a massive intervention in the profound conflict over how and under what conditions the enslaved would labor. In 1861, the nation was on the brink of a potential new birth of freedom. The Civil War was a vast and violent interregnum. On the other side of it economic inequality and racism persisted, but they did so in a world where the traditional understanding of when and how the nation-state should act had been shattered, and where the traditional methods for overseeing the labor of the most exploited and the least powerful had been overthrown.

Organizing the history of the revolutionary American Republic around the issues of who would control land and labor suggests that the years between the American Revolution and the outbreak of the Civil War should be viewed as one discrete period, even as the era of the first American Republic. 1861 saw the beginning of the end of the revolutionary American Republic, and the violent genesis of a new republican order that had the potential to use state power very differently, and that codified in its fundamental law a fully free, multi-racial citizenry.⁵⁷ The revolutionary American Republic, the nation's first republic, was shaped by arguments over who would labor where and under what conditions. Issues of property distribution and labor conditions continued to be central to the American experience after the Civil War. But the war also answered many of the questions raised by the conflicts over land and labor that did so much to shape the first American Republic. The

first Republic made slavery central to the United States and engaged in almost ceaseless conflict with Indians. As the nation relentlessly expanded west, citizens of the first Republic established the clear and sharp distinctions for when the national government should act decisively, and when it should barely act at all. The national government often intervened decisively to shape conflicts over land and labor, but primarily in circumscribed ways that fell heavily on Indians, that ceded control of millions of blacks to local authority, and that, for the most part, left white citizens alone to fend for themselves, though offering them the often considerable assistance of steady westward expansion.

The central role played by westward expansion and conflict between the Republic and its Indian neighbors, the growing centrality of slavery, the ongoing issue of economic inequality (made even more intense by rapid economic development subject to boom and bust), and the relationships citizens forged with their national and state governments shaped the world of the revolutionary American Republic, and all ultimately combined to produce the violent destruction of the Civil War. The Civil War created a very different kind of nation-state and transformed that state's relationship with its citizenry, ended slavery, and began an era in which it quickly became the case that Indians could no longer expect to war for control of a portion of the continent. In no way did the tremendous changes brought about by the Civil War bring an end to struggles over who would control land and labor. But the violent end of the first Republic, and the creation of a second Republic, produced unprecedented conditions and terms for those struggles, while also suggesting new and profoundly hopeful possibilities. What did not change was their elusive quality.⁵⁸

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SECTION I

ORIGINS OF THE
REVOLUTIONARY
AMERICAN REPUBLIC



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CHAPTER TWO

PRODUCING EMPIRE

The British Empire in Theory and Practice



Zara Anishanslin

This chapter on the eighteenth-century British Empire in North America begins in the year 1994. In that year, two Americans traveled to London. There, as they recounted, “our astonishment was inexpressible, to find this once imperial city” whose “trade was extended round the globe, and whose conquering arms had subdued a great part” of it, was “fallen to a familiar decay and ruin” like “Palmira, Athens, and Rome.” Walking about “its depopulated streets,” they described in detail “the ruins of this once famous city,” much of it “all overgrown with trees possessed by rocks.” On the banks of the Thames, instead of the buildings of Parliament, they found only “an old wall.” Where Whitehall once stood was “a field of turnips.” At a crumbling Westminster Abbey, where the “whole church had been ornamented with the monuments of admirals, generals, peers philosophers, and others,” they found the stones and statues defaced, with only two still “legible, that of Locke and Newton.” In short, they found that the glory of London, “which was the mistress of Europe, the seat of arts, learning, and power” had “vanished.” London’s physical decay in 1994 stood as mutely ruinous testimony to a historical shift that began in the late eighteenth century, when Britain began to crumble and a new power started to rise. That power, which by the late twentieth century had come to dominate the globe, was that of “imperial America.” It was to America that much of London’s population, along with her grandeur, had migrated. The once-mighty British Empire’s “sun” had set, and it had “set in the west.”¹

Savvy readers will have guessed from learning that it took these traveling Americans “a passage of forty days” to get to London in 1994 that this tale of the British and American Empires was written long before then. It was, in fact, futuristic fiction written centuries before, published in a 1771 colonial almanac. And while it does not accurately capture the London of 1994, it reveals a great deal about how colonists imagined the eighteenth-century British Empire in North America. It lays bare—almost startlingly so—ideas about a British empire migrated into the west and perceptions of an American future (and even an American empire) separate from that of Britain. And it reminds us that such ideas existed before the dramatic ruptures of the Revolution actually commenced—before the Coercive Acts shattered confidence

in Parliament's respect for colonial liberties, before blood was shed at Lexington and Concord, and before 1776.

This colonial writer of futuristic fiction was hardly alone in expressing ideas about the westward migration of empire. From British cleric George Berkeley's 1726 poem in which he famously predicted "Westward the course of empire takes its way," to theorist Adam Smith's well-known forecast in 1776 that, once America's trade and population outmatched that of Britain's, the "seat of empire" should, accordingly, move across the Atlantic, too, ideas about America as the future site of empire found expression on both sides of the Atlantic.² Throughout the time that the British ruled the American colonies in the eighteenth century, writers explored this same theme. Poets extolling westward migration wrote such lines as: "Our Fathers crost the wide Atlantick [sic] Sea/And blest themselves, when in the Desart [sic] free."³ They published their poems in colonial newspapers and as prologue to a 1730 play satirizing Massachusetts Governor Belcher. They wrote them, as Boston painter John Smibert recorded, in commonplace books, left "upon the Meeting House dorr [sic] att [sic] Roxbury when the Assembly were sitting there," and even "on a Stone dug up at Plimoth [sic]."⁴ From Smibert to the Philadelphia almanac writer, from Berkeley to Smith, ideas about siting a new imperial golden age (characterized by flourishing commerce, population, arts, and liberty) in the Atlantic colonies tapped into cultural discourse with wide transatlantic currency. Early national concepts of American empire like Thomas Jefferson's "empire of liberty" had deep, transatlantic, historical roots.⁵

This vision, of course, existed alongside (and, until 1776, within) another: that of a glorious British Empire of which colonists were proud to be a part. The two visions existed symbiotically—sometimes in tension, as in moments of protest during the imperial crises of the 1760s and 1770s, and sometimes in harmony, as in moments of military victory during wars like King George's or the French and Indian. An American-specific vision of empire and Anglicization developed side by side, in what might be called a creolized version of empire. Metropolitan ideals about its overseas empire did not always manifest as intended on colonial ground. To the contrary, the realities of local conditions specific to the colonies—widespread slavery, extensive land, and the presence of Native Americans, to name a few of the most important—fostered an empire more negotiated than transferred. Colonists themselves, as they reproduced European society across the Atlantic, created (sometimes willingly, sometimes not) material and ideological worlds never quite the same as those they left behind, shaped as they were by the exigencies of their American contexts. As colonists and their societies inexorably creolized over time, so too did empire in America. As colonists reproduced and manufactured empire in America, they consumed and traded the products of the British empire of commerce, but they also produced them. And, especially as the century and imperial crises wore on, they sought to produce more. Ideas about colonial production optimistically colored visions Britons on both sides of the Atlantic shared of unlocking the full potential of America's natural resources and population—of spreading an empire of commerce and of liberty across the continent. Over time, however, some colonists would come to think—like the almanac writer in 1771—that this continental empire of commerce and liberty should be one produced by Americans, rather than by Britons. Colonial Americans always imagined themselves to be producers as well as consumers within the British Empire,

and this colonial imagination infused revolutionary and early republican political economies built on notions (however misguided) of Americans' ability to produce. Ideas that Americans could and should pursue domestic manufacture and production—first as colonists unlocking the empire's full potential in America, then in the context of household production like homespun linked to political protest, and finally in relation to a national economy—ran throughout the century. Like Jefferson's empire of liberty, an American empire of commerce had roots deep in the past.⁶

In this creolized empire, alternating themes of empire rang out loudest at times of extreme anxiety or excessive pride, particularly during or after moments of inter- or intra-imperial crisis. In part because it is such a striking shift, from the pinnacle of shared imperial celebration that was the victory over the French in the French and Indian War, to the imperial crises that almost immediately followed it, many histories that trace the rise and fall of the British Empire in North America as prequel to the American Revolution would identify the 1763 Treaty of Paris as a good starting point, chronologically speaking.⁷ Instead, this chapter begins much earlier. It begins in the 1720s and moves to 1776, stretching from George Berkeley to Adam Smith in Britain, and from John Smibert to Thomas Jefferson in America. Such a timespan allows for broad consideration of how ideas about America as the hope of the British Empire (and, eventually, as its own empire) were expressed in both ideas and the material world. It also emphasizes the colonial origins of revolutionary and early republican political economy, particularly as they related to espousing domestic production and continental expansion for an American empire of liberty.⁸

Although only a few paragraphs long, the fictive tale of two “now imperial Americans” visiting the ruins of London in 1994 hits upon a number of important ideas about the splendor (and dissolution) of British empire, its migration across the Atlantic, and how empire manifested itself in intellectual, commercial, and physical ways. As the travellers recall, the glories of the British Empire were visibly displayed in its art and architecture, and ideologically codified in its learning and laws. What truly made Britain a great power, however, was its military might (particularly its navy), and, above all, its global trade. The British Empire was an empire of commerce, in which its “merchants were princes” and its “traffickers were the honorable of the earth.” In the 1760s, this trade was undone when “the barbarity and inhumanity committed by them in the Mogul’s empire” expelled the British from “all Asia,” and “acts of dissipation, intemperance, injustice, violence, ignorance, and despotism” against their North American colonies threw the empire “into convulsions” in every corner of the globe. As the blood of Moguls was shed and John Wilkes’s constitutional liberties were under attack, American colonists also suffered, “treated more like aliens than fellow subjects.” Callous politicians and attacks on liberty in India, England, and America coalesced, causing the British Empire, once made great through military might and global trade, to fall. This fall “scattered” British merchants “over the whole world, and more especially to the American empire, whither they were followed by most” of Britain’s “artizans [sic] and mechanics.” And although the American empire was particularly noted for giving “laws to so many regions,” the “real cause” of American “power and grandeur” was the population migration of these merchants and artisans.⁹ In the imagination of a 1771 colonist, it was the migration of traders and makers of goods across the Atlantic

that proved crucial in fulfilling Berkeley's prediction that America was where "shall be sung another golden age, / The rise of empire and of arts." In an empire of commerce, power and glory followed trade, commodities, and the people who distributed and made them.

Much ink has been spilled over the role trade and goods played in shaping the eighteenth-century British Empire.¹⁰ In particular, a considerable amount has been expended, both in the eighteenth century and by observers and scholars since, in discussing colonial consumption of British goods before the Revolution. Although Adam Smith complained that "To found a great empire for the sole purpose of raising up a people of customers" was folly, and George Berkeley, among others, preached jeremiads about the perils of over-consumption, there was also wide agreement that trade was beneficial for the empire. In 1719, Daniel Defoe wryly suggested that the Navy should rechristen its man-of-war ships with names that better reflected the true source of the empire's strength, like "*The Royal Manufacturer*" and "*The Royal Merchant*."¹¹ As another author put it decades later, a "flourishing commerce" with the colonies, in particular, dictated a stronger empire, since trade created colonial consumers who, because of their desire for goods, felt a stronger "attachment" to Britain.¹² An empire of commerce, after all, required consumers as well as merchants and artisans.

Within this empire of commerce, trade held ideological power beyond its economic import. Trade, like property, was linked to ideals about liberty as well as profit. Popular works like *Cato's Letters* (1720–23) argued that "extensive trade"—like naval power—stemmed from "liberty." Profitable commerce relied on freedom, because, as these letters memorably opined, "Nothing is more certain than that trade cannot be forced," for trade "is a coy and humorous dame, who must be won by flattery and allurements, and always flies force and power."¹³ So important was the idea of freedom in trade that some Britons—in old and New England alike—equated it with religious liberty. As one minister in England wrote, "Religion and trade equally thrive in liberty, and are alike injured by oppression and persecution."¹⁴ Revolutionary-era protests against curtailed commercial freedom tapped into just such long-held ideas about links between freedom and trade when they equated Parliamentary legislation tightening control over colonial commerce and consumption with slavery. In the wake of the Townshend Acts, a proponent of colonial rights (and, until 1774, a united empire) quoted *Cato's Letters*, reiterating the long-understood connections between trade and liberty by stating explicitly that: "The *Britons* are a free, commercial, and naval people, and sound policy, or common sense, which is the same thing, requires that all their proceedings be subservient to this condition. To preserve their freedom it is necessary that all parts and persons in the empire be free."¹⁵

Liberty sustained and encouraged trade, but trade, in turn, nourished liberty. "Trade promotes liberty," it was argued, for a "free and open Trade" enriched the British people while guarding against tyranny. By elevating a "whole posterity," widespread trade gives "none of them an opportunity to oppress and ruin the rest." Moreover, trade fostered a healthy civic society, for "the manners introduced by trade are a considerable tolerance of liberty." Trade also cultivated political freedom. For example, "no sooner" had the Greeks become adept at trade "than their monarchies began to totter, and they exhibited in their several states more models

of a free government than have since appeared in the world.”¹⁶ In the British Empire of commerce, trade and liberty were inextricably entangled, each influencing and sustaining the other. Trade helped to sustain the liberty that defined the rights of free-born Englishmen; conversely, commerce also depended upon liberty. In this empire of commerce, the freedom of colonists across the Atlantic to consume and trade was fraught with ideological meaning beyond the practical and the economic.

Much as those writing about trade and the empire did in the eighteenth century, contemporary scholarly interpretations emphasize the importance of colonial consumption to understanding the British Empire in North America. Scholars have tended to cast colonists (particularly from the 1740s on) as emulative buyers who traded their tobacco, timber, fish, fur, and wheat in a rush to buy the “baubles of Britain.”¹⁷ This justly influential interpretation holds crucial consequences for narratives about the growth and collapse of the British Empire in North America. It portrays colonial consumers as people who helped to drive the British “consumer revolution”—the wish for metropolitan goods like cloth and ceramics first encouraged partaking in British mercantilism, and then became a means to protest the imperial system. Paradoxically, the very mercantilist consumption that strengthened the British Empire led to the colonists’ eventual ability to exert local political power, as they used non-importation and non-consumption to transform the metropolitan commerce meant to keep them reliant upon the British Empire into political protest.

This interpretation, though valuable, leaves out important pieces of the narrative. Colonists were never simply imitative consumers, satisfied with the products of Britain. They were also producers. To be sure, they bought (and smuggled) in the baubles of Britain (and Europe and Asia), and imported goods and slaves from Africa and the West Indies, but they also wove cloth, crafted furniture, etched silver, published newspapers, painted portraits, and built ships, barrels, houses, and cities. Like their compatriots across the Atlantic, they too were “artizans [sic] and mechanics” as well as merchants and consumers. They did not simply distribute and buy; they also made. Looking at colonial production as well as consumption, particularly as both related to ideas about America as a place for empire to flourish, divulges much about how the British Empire in North America worked (and how it did not).

From the 1720s to 1776, colonists used the objects they created and the commodities they produced to carve out and assert their place within the empire. When the British Empire entered into political crisis in the 1760s, colonists used production, and things they produced, to protest. Colonial complaints during the imperial crises did not just center on commerce and consumption, and Parliamentary restrictions on colonial freedom to trade and consume were not the only imperial measures compared ideologically to slavery. On both sides of the Atlantic, the colonial right to produce was also a fraught political issue. Although he dismissed British curtailment of colonial rights to produce goods like wool, hats, steel, and pig iron as merely “impertinent badges of slavery” (with little real hurtful effect), in 1776 Adam Smith noted that, theoretically, prohibiting “a great people” from “making all that they can of every part of their own produce, or from employing their stock and industry in the way that they judge most advantageous to themselves, is a manifest violation of the most sacred rights of mankind.”¹⁸ When colonists protested Parliamentary legislation in the 1760s and 1770s, they stated their unhappiness with the metropole hindering their right to produce. They also stated their intent to produce as an act

of political protest. The companion outrage at imperial limits placed on their consumption and commerce was indignation over restrictions placed on their production of things like hats and iron. Similarly, the protest tactic they adopted in tandem with non-importation and non-consumption was the vow to apply themselves industriously to production—to domestic manufacture. When Benjamin Franklin declared before Parliament during the Stamp Act crisis that: “I do not know a single article imported into the Northern colonies, but what they can either do without, or make themselves,” he might have been indulging in a bit of theatrical hyperbole.¹⁹ But his statement perfectly captured how important production, as well as consumption, was to colonial conceptions of their place in the British Empire and to the ideals and mechanics of their political protest against imperial strictures on their freedom; to produce as well as to consume.

At times, in fact, they even led their non-importation and non-consumption agreements with statements about promoting American production. Like Smith, they linked production to liberty, noting, in typical language, that, “we firmly agree with each other to promote Industry, Harmony & Oeconomy [sic] among our Selves & as much as possible manufacture our own Apparel & encourage others in all arts & sciences” for “ye Good of ye Community” and “to make us a free & a happy people.”²⁰ Even more strikingly, at times they foregrounded imperial strictures on their production of goods as the “most grievous” of “ministerial innovations.”²¹ For example, in a 1768 broadside that Philadelphia merchants issued to assert their protest against the Townshend Duties, they began their enumeration of the “most grievous” imperial offenses with restrictions on production. In fact, they began by listing the very manufactures Smith later highlighted; laws against colonists making steel, iron, hats, and wool.²² Colonists wished to be producers as well as consumers in the empire of commerce, and when they began to protest imperial politics in the 1760s, they asserted their rights to, and grievances over, production as well as consumption.

In addition to being consumers and mercantilist producers for the British Empire, Americans produced their own imperial reality, whether through crafting mechanisms for disseminating ideology, like missionaries or poems, or making things that physically transferred imperial identity like cities and cloth. Looking at what was produced in America to build empire, as well as considering what colonists wished to (but were not allowed to) produce, further illuminates ideas about placing empire in North America. Buildings were one of the most durable, and visibly striking, tools of building empire. The futuristic fiction of two “imperial Americans” visiting London in 1994 highlights the important role architecture played in conceptions and manifestations of British Empire around the Atlantic world. It is no accident that the author of the 1771 piece used architectural ruin and urban decay as the organizing metaphor of his political diatribe. Nor is it coincidental that he began his story by mentioning that his protagonists “landed in the same spot which Julius Caesar had done two thousand years before.” Eighteenth-century Britons were fascinated by the rise and fall of ancient empires, most especially that of Rome. This fascination manifested itself in both ideological and material ways. Britons proved avid consumers of Wedgwood porcelain patterned after ancient models, composed Augustan poetry modeled on Virgil and Horace, visited the ruins of Herculaneum, Rome, and Pompeii, and bought prints of these sites to hang in their homes. They pondered the

lessons of Roman history and politics for their own. In *The Wealth of Nations*—published, in a telling coincidence, the same year as the first volume of Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*—Smith, like many before and since, compared the British empire to ancient Roman and Greek ones, as well as to contemporary ones like the French and Spanish empires. For a culture long familiar in ways profound and popular with ancient Rome and its empire’s fate, architectural ruins like those found by the fictional travellers of 1994 were readily understood material signs of imperial decline.

Architecture not in ruins, on the other hand, was understood as a way to announce and spread empire. Buildings and cities were visible markers of territorial possession; material proof of the successful colonization of land that maps advertised.²³ Eighteenth-century Britons espoused the classical architecture of Palladianism, in particular, as a visible mark of expanding empire.²⁴ Anglo-Palladianism, in which English architects adapted design rules set down by the Augustan architect Vitruvius, was an ideal architectural style for an eighteenth-century culture that celebrated the British Empire as the modern iteration of that of Augustan Rome. One reason Britons viewed Anglo-Palladian designs as suitable for announcing a British aesthetic was that they were Anglicized Vitruvian architecture—neoclassical design washed conveniently clean of papist associations with Italy and France.²⁵ Palladian architectural design books, building forms, and aesthetic migrated from Britain to the North American colonies, from Massachusetts to Georgia, along with its attendant ideas about expanding the Protestant British Empire. But it also materially expressed ideas about America’s place within the British Empire, much as Americans later used neoclassical Roman and Greek architecture to trumpet American Empire in the early republic and antebellum periods.²⁶ A look at how empire builders in the very different northern and southern colonies of Rhode Island and Georgia used architecture to build empire from the 1720s to 1740s illustrates specific ways in which America was envisioned as a site for invigorating the British Empire. It also shows the inexorable effects colonial reality had on metropolitan ideals. Architecture was among the metropolitan exports that took a creole form in the colonies.

Palladian architecture, for example, was pivotal to Berkeley’s vision of the eventual westward course of empire—but what he ended building in the colonies was a hybrid of the local and the metropolitan, rather than a purely metropolitan form plopped down on American soil. When Berkeley composed his poem about empire moving west, he did so in the wake of his disillusionment with the South Sea Bubble scandal (a stock market collapse that struck Britain in 1720) and the early throes of his ambition to found a college in Bermuda. Meant to supply “zealous missionaries” to propagate the gospel to “immoral” North American colonists and “barbarous” Native American “savages,” St. Paul’s (as the college was to be called) was designed to educate an army of virtuous colonial clerics (notably, including Native American ones) to combat the systemic vice Berkeley believed threatened the future of the empire.²⁷ As his (later famous) poem made clear, the college was as much about empire building as it was about propagating the gospel. In his “Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America,” Berkeley writes that “The Muse” has fled Europe, “disgusted at an age and clime/Barren of every glorious theme.” There is a sense of expectation—of preparation not yet fulfilled—in Berkeley’s invigorated British Empire in America. The Muse, he writes, “now waits a better time” in “distant

lands”—lands “Where nature guides and virtue rules.” Those distant, more virtuous lands were across the Atlantic, for, as Berkeley memorably closed his poem, “Westward the course of empire takes its way; / The first four acts already past, / A fifth shall close the drama with the day; / Time’s noblest offspring is the last.” America, in other words, would be the future site of empire. The college in Bermuda (to Berkeley’s mind, at least) was an institution meant to foster this imperial migration.

Berkeley’s utopian scheme gained royal approval and the promise of £20,000 in parliamentary funding. Among his plans were architectural ones, for his project included an elaborately landscaped plan for a radial city with neoclassical, temple-like buildings and a column-fronted Anglican Church.²⁸ In 1728, Berkeley and his entourage went westward themselves, crossing the Atlantic to stay in Newport, Rhode Island, where Berkeley settled with his family in 1729 to wait for the promised funds. Their wait stretched to nearly three years. Parliament never supplied the money, the college in Bermuda was never established, and the Berkeleys sailed back across the Atlantic. The imposing neoclassical metropolis in Bermuda, then, was never built. Nevertheless, Berkeley left an architectural imprint in the colonies in his family home, a clapboard farmhouse in Newport that he grandiosely called “Whitehall.”²⁹ Berkeley introduced one of the first Anglo-Palladian designs to the colonial North American landscape when he put a large door and door surround on the front of the house, which he had copied from the 1727 architectural design book William Kent’s *Designs of Inigo Jones*, a work subsequently popular on both sides of the Atlantic.

Berkeley named his farm after London’s Whitehall Palace, which had burned to the ground in the 1690s. Rebuilding it (using designs by Inigo Jones) was a favorite idea among Britons who saw Palladianism as a way to announce the rise of a glorious British Empire.³⁰ As Alexander Pope (another author widely read on both sides of the Atlantic) wrote in his poem “Windsor Forest,” a Palladian Whitehall built to Jones’s designs would symbolize an Augustan empire moved from Rome to London: “Behold! Augusta’s glitt’ring Spires increase, / And Temples rise, the beauteous Works of Peace. / I see, I see where two fair Cities bend / Their ample Bow, a new White-Hall ascend!”³¹ Pope’s popularity among colonial readers meant that his reference to a Palladian Whitehall as harbinger of London as a new Rome was one that may very well have been as familiar to the 1771 author describing turnips growing on the site of Whitehall in 1994 as it was to Berkeley and visitors to his Newport farm decades earlier. In building Whitehall, Berkeley used domestic architecture as he planned to use public buildings in Bermuda. In both instances, Berkeley showed how Britons could use architecture to expand and transfer empire, first from Rome to London, and then from London to America.

Despite its metropolitan popularity, Anglo-Palladianism’s religious associations were particularly relevant to ideas Berkeley and others held about the rise of a newly virtuous British Empire across the Atlantic. Berkeley’s Anglo-Palladian design for his farm Whitehall, and his proposed Bermuda plan, fit into this colonial religious context. These were architectural projects employed to spread not just empire, but Protestant empire, and Protestantism itself.³² Berkeley justified his Bermuda plan as something that would strengthen the empire, improving its moral fiber by inculcating religion among British colonists. He also saw it as a means of educating Protestant Native American ministers who would then convert other Indians. This, he thought, would create an indigenous Protestant guard against the more traditionally successful

mission efforts of the Catholic French and Spanish and against these nations' imperial expansion in North America and the Caribbean. Berkeley warned that "Spanish missionaries in the south, and the French in the north" spreading Catholicism "would probably end in the utter extirpation of our Colonies, on the safety whereof depends so much of the nation's wealth, and so considerable a branch of his Majesty's revenue."³³ Berkeley's project exemplified one way in which "The idea of the converted Indian made colonialism imaginatively possible"—both the imagined threat of converted Catholic Indians and the imagined promise of converted Protestant Indians.³⁴ Proponents of Anglo-Palladianism like Pope appreciated it as a mechanism for giving Britain a classical architecture free from papist associations; Berkeley extended these religious implications across the Atlantic, using colonial architecture as a tool for simultaneously expanding the Protestant British Empire and thwarting its rival Catholic empires.

He was by no means the only one to do so, however. One reason Berkeley left his imperial stamp on Rhode Island rather than on Bermuda was that part of the funds promised him went instead to finance James Ogelthorpe's utopian vision for an empire-building project—a vision that resulted in the founding of the colony of Georgia. The two projects, like their chief engineers, nearly overlapped. Berkeley sailed back to England in 1731, and Ogelthorpe (himself once a subscriber to Berkeley's project), sailed to Georgia in 1732. Like Berkeley's Bermuda project, the colony of Georgia had the approval of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG).³⁵ And like Berkeley's missionary college, the new colony was designed to strengthen the Protestant British Empire against rival Catholic empires. It, too, was advertised as a project that would convert Indians and increase colonial religiosity (differing, however, from Berkeley's project in its initial eschewing of slave labor). It, too, was seen as a colonial settlement that would keep the British empire safe from imperial encroachments by the Spanish and French empires as well as Native Americans, for "As towns are established and grow populous along the rivers Savannah and Alatomaha, they will make such a barrier as will render the southern frontier of the British Colonies on the Continent of America, safe from Indian and other enemies."³⁶ Where Georgia departed from Berkeley's imperial model was its perceived contribution to mercantilism and British manufacture, and its emphasis on colonial production. Georgia held promise, its supporters took care to boast, of "increasing the strength and commerce of *Great Britain*."³⁷ As the Trustees more specifically noted, it was hoped that Georgia—located "about the same latitude with parts of China, Persia, Palestine, and the Madeiras"—would be able to supply England with "Raw Silk, Wine, Oil, Dyes, Drugs, and many other materials for manufactures, which she is obliged to purchase from Southern countries."³⁸ Like the Bermuda college, Georgia was meant to increase Protestant religiosity and virtue among Indians as well as colonists, and to protect Britain's American colonies from Spanish and French encroachment. But it was also intended to enrich colonial producers and employ English manufacturers, all while providing Britons around the empire with English-made goods to buy in place of those from Catholic countries.

Both Berkeley's Bermuda college project and Ogelthorpe's Georgia used architecture and urban planning to build empire in America. The differences and similarities between their buildings and city plans illuminate the different ways Britons envisioned siting imperial utopia across the Atlantic. Berkeley, for example, envisioned empire

in the American colonies operating in stages. First, through missionary work and religiosity, America would serve as the fountainhead for a more virtuous imperial society and bulwark against expansion by rival Catholic empires. Eventually, it would become the site of an eventual migration of empire itself. The founders of Georgia, on the other hand, saw it in more traditional terms, imperially speaking. Georgia was a utopia and a Protestant sanctuary meant to protect the British Empire from its Catholic rivals, but like other British North American colonies, it was also meant, most simply, to add to the Empire's territory and the mother country's wealth.

Since, like Bermuda, Georgia was meant to propagate the Protestant gospel, its trustees, just as Berkeley had, also used Anglo-Palladian architecture to announce the spread of Protestant British Empire. The architecture of Palladianism helped build the British Empire around the Atlantic World, whether in the northern colony of Rhode Island or the southern one of Georgia. It was material proof of the progress of the British Empire across time and space, of "the operation of a *translatio imperialis* which codified the power of England's emergent empire."³⁹ But, as was embodied, in many cases, by the Anglo-Palladian buildings that colonists erected, this transfer of empire was less a perfect copy of the metropolitan ideal than it was a creolized amalgam. In 1738, the Trustees of the Georgia colony hired Henry Flitcroft, one of London's well-known promoters of Anglo-Palladian design, to design a plan for a Palladian brick church in Savannah.⁴⁰ The trustees instructed the engineer who carried the plan to Georgia, if necessary, to alter the architect's design to make "said Building a Place of Refuge and Defence for the Inhabitants upon any surprise" attack.⁴¹ This instruction was a nod to the particularities of colonial reality. It also serves as reminder that threat of attack by French, Spanish, or Native Americans, sometimes necessitated a translation, rather than a simple transfer, of empire in its forms and functions. In the end, local complications—ranging from the idiosyncrasies of George Whitefield's church leadership to war with the Spanish—dictated that the Savannah church took years to build and departed from the London architect's design. The Anglo-Palladian design Flitcroft drew in London had to be "modified to the economic and social circumstances of an infant colony uneasily poised on the border between two empires."⁴² Much as Berkeley's clapboard farmhouse Whitehall used local wood planks rather than the metropolitan stone of Inigo Jones, the church in Savannah embodied the "imaginative interplay between local practices and metropolitan ideas," a creative negotiation that produced something different from the London architect's design.⁴³

From Rhode Island to Georgia, men eager to rejuvenate the British Empire—whether morally or commercially—by planting it in America used Anglo-Palladian architecture to announce its migration. But, just as the colony of Georgia developed into a society quite different from the one its founding trustees intended (abandoning its utopian ideal of being a society without slaves and becoming a slave society), these empire builders often found that what they built was an American version of a British ideal; a localized rendering of a metropolitan concept. Often what they built were things "recognizably Anglo-American in concept and in many small details" but "distinctly regional in their overall form."⁴⁴ In its material expressions as well as its ideas, empire did not always transfer as intended. Buildings were one durable mark of empire building that exemplified how place and local circumstance affected the realities of empire in America. Whether because of a war with Spain, threat of

Indian attack, difference in construction materials, disagreement with imperial policy, or personal idiosyncrasy, colonists could not, or did not, always follow metropolitan instructions when building empire.

Soliciting a grand design for an Anglo-Palladian church was material incarnation of the trustees' faith in Georgia's capacity to simultaneously propagate the gospel and buttress Protestant empire against its Catholic rivals. Its city plan, however, emphasized its productive potential. As one apologist for the colony noted, "it is an undeniable argument, that as all Colonies and Plantations are beneficial to their mother country in proportion to their additional increase of people and of trade, so Georgia, by being well settled, will greatly enrich England in these two respects," particularly because "its products are at least equal to those of other places, the silk in particular."⁴⁵ Georgia was to be a utopia, but it was to be a productive one; a utopia that created both a burgeoning Protestant population and marketable commodities to enrich the empire. Whereas the Bermuda college's metropolis was imagined as a space that de-emphasized commerce and trade, using temple-like buildings to glorify learning and religion, Savannah's plan was dedicated to production of the raw silk and "many other materials for manufactures" it was hoped the colony would send back to Britain. It included, for example, a Trustees' Garden that experimented with mulberry trees for raising silkworms, and early Georgia land grants specified that settlers plant a certain number of mulberry trees to encourage production of raw silk.⁴⁶ Silk, widely seen by colonists and metropolitan imperialists alike as one of the commodities that was most promising for Georgians to produce, held the added benefit of allowing Britain to stop importing raw silk for its weaving industry from places like Italy and the Levant, thus keeping more of its specie within the empire and being "greatly advantageous to this kingdom in the mercantile way."⁴⁷ An imagined view of the colony, published in Benjamin Martyn's *Reasons for Establishing the Colony of Georgia* (1733), emphasized the importance of such productive possibilities, rather than its moral and religious ones, showing its harbor, row after row of precisely planted mulberry trees, and, in the foreground, colonists hard at work chopping down forests and building neat structures on the newly cleared land. A tiny church is seen only in the distance, dwarfed by the neat groves of mulberry trees surrounding it. Production, not prayer, dominates this colonial landscape.

Georgian sericulture, or silk production, captured the imagination of Britons like the artist who drafted this illustration in part because Britain's weaving industry—silk and wool—held symbolic as well as economic importance in the empire of commerce. In the case of the silk industry, in fact, its symbolic importance far outweighed its economic impact (not least because it was an industry seen as always in competition with Britain's rival, France).⁴⁸ When Defoe argued for rechristening British naval ships with names such as *The Royal Manufacturer* and *The Royal Merchant*, he did so in a pamphlet series he wrote on behalf of the London Weavers' Company, during one of the calico crises that embroiled England in heated protest surrounding the East India Company (decades before a controversy over tea, more famously, became an issue).⁴⁹ As Defoe noted, "When I look sometimes upon our Royal Navy, and a glorious and beautiful Sight it is to an *Englishman*, as it is a Sight which causes Envy and Apprehension to a Foreigner; I say, when I view the Men of War, it often occurs to my Thoughts, how, by that Prodigy of a Manufacture, all these

Things are the Produce of our Wool, the Effect of our Working up the Fleece of our Sheep, and the Labour of the Silkworm.”⁵⁰

In the empire of commerce that was the eighteenth-century British Empire, textiles were among the empire’s most important manufactures. Wool and silk, in particular, were potent products within this trade. But both economically and symbolically they meant very different things. Wool was among the popularly consumed manufactures Britain could—and did—successfully produce. That Britain had the necessary raw materials, labor, and infrastructure to produce it within the British Isles made wool, in many ways, an ideal export product for the mother country. The wool trade, accordingly, was an important one economically, but it also held symbolic power in discussions of British political economy and labor. Silk held a different place within imperial commerce and production. Britain could raise sheep; but its climate was not well suited for raising silkworms. Thus raw silk for its manufacture had to be imported. Until the East India Company consolidated its power over the Bengali silk industry in the 1760s, the American colonies were the likeliest internal source of raw silk. Despite repeated failures, throughout the eighteenth century, Parliament continued to offer premiums for colonial silk production. Like Palladian architecture, sericulture was one of the things colonists strove to build in colonies as widely different as New England, Pennsylvania, and Georgia. From Connecticut to Georgia, colonists persisted in attempts to harness the ready availability of indigenous mulberry trees into successful sericulture.⁵¹ Silk was one of the natural resources Americans both north and south sought to harness, first for mercantilist needs, and then for domestic manufacture. The history of silk production illuminates much about the role the natural world and production both played in shifting conceptions of America’s place in the British Empire.

Silk was one of the natural products—like fish, fur, and timber—that Britons and Americans alike touted as evidence of the particular imperial promise held by the North American colonies.⁵² Early English promotional tracts uniformly praised the towering trees, teeming fish, and exotic wildlife, often noting the profuseness of mulberry trees and silkworms as big as walnuts. American colonists also saw the possibilities of their natural world, including the productive ones, as sources of profit for themselves and the empire both. Among the natural features people on both sides of the Atlantic agreed held the most imperial promise was land. Not only for its ability to provide natural resources, agricultural products, and lucrative commodities like timber and silk, but also for the sheer expansive possibilities for trade and population growth afforded by the continent itself.

Around the same time the colony of Georgia was founded, Henry Popple published “A Map of the British Empire in America, with the French and Spanish settlements adjacent thereto.” Both its title and its pictorials, which used different colors to demarcate the possessions of each empire, emphasized the inter-imperial rivalries that shaped eighteenth-century reality in America and the Caribbean. Popple’s map, sponsored by the Board of Trade and Plantations that supervised trade between Britain and its colonies, offers insight into how those directing commerce from the metropole imagined their American colonies. Popple’s map (and its title) illustrate the geographic realities that led both Berkeley and Ogelthorpe to advertise their imperial projects as ways to promote the British Empire against its Catholic rivals. Some copies of



Figure 2.1 “A Map of the British Empire in America, with the French and Spanish settlements adjacent thereto,” by Henry Popple (London: 1733). Courtesy of The Newberry Library.

it also used red lines—extending indefinitely toward the west—to stretch the boundaries of colonial Virginia and Carolina across the continent (and, pointedly, over land marked as French and Spanish).⁵³ In addition to illustrating inter-imperial rivalries, the map displayed an empire in North America imagined as distinctly continental, as well as part of the Atlantic world. Popple’s empire in America was one that faced west as well as east, an empire that simultaneously encompassed Atlantic world commerce and continental expansion. Popple’s map hung on walls in public offices in Britain, and in the homes of North American colonists, linking Britons separated by an ocean in a shared continental and commercial vision of empire in America. Over time, however, that shared vision began to diverge. Particularly after mid-century—and, most markedly, during the imperial crises

following the French and Indian War—colonists asserted their rights to shape this continental and commercial empire on the ground—to inhabit a creolized version of empire. American colonists wished to freely make and trade, as well as buy, goods within (and outside of) the British Empire of commerce. They also wished to settle on the continent where they would, regardless of restrictions diplomats put in place.

The eighteenth-century global British Empire began as an *imperium pelagi*, or an “empire of the seas,” one that rested (conceptually at least) on the combined strength of naval power, trade, and liberty. In America, where empire took on an additional layer of land-based, continental importance, the imagined empire was also linked to ideas about the American natural world and its productive possibilities. Initially, this concept fit neatly into mercantilist ideals about an empire of commerce. In the early days of the colony, for example, as noted, Georgia’s productive possibilities were celebrated for the boost they would give to the British treasury and to British manufacture. In the 1740s and 1750s, however, the overall trajectory of development and stability improved for colonies from North to South. As the trade and population of port cities like Boston, Newport, Philadelphia, and Charleston expanded, their residents used Anglo-Palladian architecture to build the everyday infrastructure of empire. Colonial architects like Peter Harrison designed structures like Redwood Library in Newport and King’s Chapel in Boston, architecture for use in non-utopian colonial societies that announced the spread of British Empire in North America while also—like Christ Church in Savannah and Berkeley’s Whitehall—embodying its creolization. Redwood Library, for example, appeared to be built of stone, as it would have been had it been constructed in England. Because of the availability of construction materials, however (a colonial lack of stone and good supply of timber), it was covered in wooden planks painted and scored to fool the eye to look like stone. Private homes up and down the seaboard echoed this localized manifestation of British forms, replicating recognizably European forms and aesthetic adapted to local conditions and construction techniques.

The adaptations Americans made to their material world when building their everyday infrastructure and architecture were similar, metaphorically, to those they made institutionally and ideologically. Redwood Library, for example, grew from Newport’s Philosophical Society, a group partly inspired by Berkeley’s time in Rhode Island and characterized by a stated tolerance of religious diversity in its membership that reflected Newport’s religious pluralism. Local materials and needs dictated that colonial American buildings differed from those in other provincial cities in the empire. For example, an Anglo-Palladian library in timber-scarce and fire-fearful London would not be built of wood, nor would an Anglo-Palladian church in Bristol require design adaptations to make “said Building a Place of Refuge and Defence for the Inhabitants upon any surprise” attack.⁵⁴

In much the same way, Americans had a different relationship to the British Empire than other provincial members of it because the realities of their daily lives were different. Living in slave societies (and even societies with slaves, as New York in the 1740s illustrated) sharpened fears of insurrection among white colonists. Britain’s imperial wars sharpened fears of attacks from the French and Native Americans in New England, or the Spanish and Indians in Georgia, or anxieties over French and Native American violence in Pennsylvania. Boston painter John Smibert, writing to

London about the impending expedition to Louisbourg, fretted that “if it dos [sic] not succeed we shal [sic] be almost undone here, for our best men, the flower of ye country are going & ye expence wil [sic] be a prodigious sum of money,” worrying that if it failed it “must ruin this Province, but I hope we shal [sic] not be deserted by our mother country.”⁵⁵ In the subsequent inter-imperial war, colonists expressed similar concerns. Pennsylvanian Edward Shippen, for example, charged with helping to organize wagons to supply General Edward Braddock’s operations during the French and Indian War, feared nothing less than that “the fate of America seems to depend much upon the Success of those present Campaigns.”⁵⁶ Smibert was concerned with a naval operation to gain access to Atlantic fisheries; Shippen with a campaign about land in western Pennsylvania. This shift in concern at times of inter-imperial war from the 1740s to 1750s is a revealing one, and it mimics colonial shifts in thinking about the American place in the British Empire. In the 1740s, Americans were proud and invested members in Britain’s *imperium pelagi*. By the time of the French and Indian War the following decade, the vision of a continental empire had taken on added importance.⁵⁷

In the 1750s and 1760s, ideas about colonial production of commodities like silk became increasingly linked to ideas about expanding the physical as well as conceptual empire in America. The continent would provide outlets for colonial population growth and production, as well as benefit the trade, wealth, and manufactures of the mother country and wider British empire. By the 1760s, when the imperial crises began, an American natural commodity like silk remained a “most important addition to the publick [sic] Stock” of the British Empire.⁵⁸ But changes in its production, and the rhetoric surrounding its production, also hinted at colonial dissatisfaction with imperial strictures on their production and manufacture. This colonial desire to produce, in turn, was tied to ideas about expanding empire on the American continent. Henry Popple, Benjamin Franklin, Adam Smith, and anonymous colonists alike celebrated the expansiveness of the continent’s land (with the attendant possibilities for population growth and American production and trade) in maps, private letters, treatises, and poems.⁵⁹ From the 1730s to the 1760s, such continental visions underwent a discernible shift. The visions, like colonial society itself, might be said to have creolized, as colonial society stabilized and expanded, enriched by population growth and colonial production and distribution of lucrative commodities like wheat, timber, fur, and indigo.

Benjamin Franklin’s thoughts on textile production, and the efforts of his American Philosophical Society at silk production, offer an instructive example. Not long after Parliament passed the Sugar Act in 1764, Franklin wrote to his friend Peter Collinson, a London textile merchant and Royal Society member with an avid interest in American natural history and botanicals who regularly procured American seeds from John Bartram, the Pennsylvania botanist. Franklin warned that if Parliament “confine us in America to your own Sugar Islands for that Commodity,” it would “restrain in the same Proportion our Power of making Remittance to you, & of course our Demand for your Goods; for you will not clothe us out of Charity, tho’ to receive 100 P.c.t for it in Heaven.” Franklin’s reference to colonial inability to consume presaged the wide-ranging consumer-based action to come, when American merchants and consumers throughout the colonies voluntarily initiated non-importation agreements in reaction to the Stamp Act the following year.

His letter also serves as reminder of the omnipresence of concerns about production that accompanied thoughts on consumption. Franklin did not raise the threat of colonists reducing their consumption of British trade and manufacture simply as a result of their inability (in the face of increased taxes) to afford British goods. In addition, in an argument reminiscent of that Adam Smith would make in 1776 about the seat of empire moving west, Franklin predicted that this shift in consumption patterns would also occur due to production. In particular, this change would come because of the productive possibilities American natural resources, availability of land, and population growth afforded. In a somewhat tongue-in-cheek but revealing example, he wrote that “we have discover’d a Beach in a Bay several Miles round, the pebbles of which are in the Form of Buttons, whence it is called Button-mold Bay; where thousands of Tons may be had for fetching; and as the Sea washed down the Slaty Cliff, more are continually manufacturing.” Noting that this news “might displease a very respectable Body among you, the Button-makers,” he offered the opinion that knowledge of this great natural resource should be “agreeable to yourself as a Virtuoso [sic].” In other words, such a natural history vignette would please Collinson’s curiosity as an erudite member of the Royal Society. Franklin undoubtedly knew that his friend, a textile merchant who exported cloth to North America, would be less pleased to hear his opinion that “As we have now got Buttons; ’tis something towards our Cloathing [sic], and who knows but in time we may found out where to get Cloth.” Again, Franklin used the natural productive possibilities of the American continent and its people to justify the shift from a colonial society that consumed metropolitan goods to one that produced them, asking his friend to “consider *the Rate of our Increase* and tell me if you can increase your Wooll [sic] in that Proportion.” Moreover, he wondered, “where, in your little Island you can feed the Sheep.” As Franklin pithily put it, “Britain would, if she could, manufacture & trade for all the World,” but “Nature has put Bounds to your Abilities, tho’ none to your Desires.”⁶⁰

By contrast, as shown by Button-mold Bay and the boundless opportunity for population growth and sheep grazing the continent provided, nature had put few bounds on the American ability to produce. On the back of Franklin’s letter to Collinson, a note dated a month later echoed Franklin’s thoughts inside. This note (which is, interestingly enough, not, seemingly, in Franklin’s hand) made it clear what the colonial stance would be: “If the report of what your Parliament has done for us be comply’d with, we so must drink Wine of our own making or none at all,” for “The more Duties Wee [sic] pay, the less Brittish [sic] Manufactures we shall be able to Import,” and—taking Franklin’s hints about naturally occurring buttons and wide-ranging sheep to their logical conclusion—“the more Wee [sic] just be obliged to Manufacture both Woolen & Linnen [sic].”⁶¹ Here, before the Stamp Act galvanized colonists into consumer-based protest, was already evidence of their contention that they would be unable to consume. And, moreover, that they would be “obliged” to produce; an extra blow to British trade with the colonies. Such fear of commercial loss was what, as Adam Smith put it, “rendered the repeal of the stamp act, among the merchants at least, a popular measure” and was why, in 1776, the “expectation of a rupture with the colonies” would strike “the people of Great Britain with more terror than they ever felt for a Spanish armada, or a French invasion.”⁶²

Like Franklin's musings on Button-mold Bay, efforts in the 1770s by the American Philosophical Society (APS) to produce silk reveals colonial preoccupation with the possibilities the natural world afforded for American production.⁶³ The APS was established in 1743, an institution that might be said—like Redwood Library, another institution founded in the 1740s—to be at the vanguard of the American Enlightenment.⁶⁴ As its founder Franklin wrote, its founding reflected colonial growth, for “The first drudgery of settling new colonies is now pretty well over, and there are many in every province in circumstances that set them at ease, and afford leisure to cultivate the finer arts, and improve the common stock of knowledge.”⁶⁵ Its members gained fame for scientific experiments and empirical observations of American natural history across the Atlantic as well as in America, and it provides an example of how those officially marginalized in global knowledge networks of learned men (like women and colonists) did, in fact, actively contribute to them.⁶⁶ In 1770, the APS founded a “Silk Society,” which operated out of the APS a “Committee on Husbandry and American Improvements.” Describing itself as a “Number of Gentlemen, animated with a Love of their Country” to promote the “raising of silk,” the Silk Society aimed to put Pennsylvania before Georgia as the leader in colonial sericulture.⁶⁷ Sericulture appealed to the erudite members of the APS as a manufacture that combined commerce and science; affording both fascinating study of botanicals and insects (relying, as it did, on mulberry trees and silkworms) and a profitable commodity. In the sericulture guide they published in 1770, they made clear how important local knowledge was to the success of their venture. This guide, *Directions for the Breeding and Management of Silk-Worms*, offered a history of the Silk Society's efforts, as well as summaries and translations of European treatises on sericulture. This book offers insight into the importance of creolized knowledge in the Atlantic World, however, as it sought to “elucidate the French treatises” of Boissier du Sauvages with “adaptations and notes particular to our own climate” and asked colonists to share their expertise—particularly that “better adapted to this climate and country than what are delivered” in the European treatises.

Like the majority of colonial American sericulture efforts, the sericulture efforts of the APS—which included setting up an urban manufactory, or filature, to wind silk from cocoons into reels—were not, ultimately, enormously successful. Yet they reveal much about the importance Americans placed on production. In the Pennsylvania of 1770, just as in the Georgia of 1733, silk production was a symbol of empire's promise. But in the intervening decades from the 1730s to the 1770s, as silk production never quite reached its hoped for lucrative potential and the imperial crisis deepened, the symbolic importance attached to silk production by colonists and metropolitans diverged. Those in the metropole continued to hope the American colonies would provide raw material for their London silk industry (as proved by Parliament's offering of premiums for silk production in the 1760s). Colonists, on the other hand, moved from merely supplying the metropole with raw silk to hinting that silk production symbolized American development. They did so cautiously at first, as was the case with Franklin and the APS's Silk Society. Franklin called silk “the happiest of all inventions for cloathing [sic]” and praised its potential for clothing large populations like that of China. Not coincidentally, Franklin also predicted a large population for America (famously, in his Parliamentary testimony over the Stamp Act, and more privately, as in his letter on Button-mold Bay).

His backing of the project was his implicit recognition of the productive possibilities and population growth embodied in the American continent; the type of growth that led Adam Smith to predict a westward shift of the seat of British Empire.

When Franklin implied that the landmass of America could better afford to support the sheep necessary to clothe a large and growing population than the island of Britain, he drew upon long-standing ideas about the westward spread of empire. Nearly thirty years before, painter John Smibert (a member of George Berkeley's entourage) created a work, "View of Boston" (ca. 1738), that sketched the same possibilities for American textile production and commercial advancement. In "View of Boston," a British colonist stands on an uncultivated hilltop across from the city. In the harbor below, the water is crowded with boats—evidence of New England's robust carrying trade. With the colonist is a Native American family, looking out to the distance beyond Boston, and behind them is a flock of grazing sheep. Native Americans will, the painting implies, "civilize" (i.e. convert, as the imperial scheme that brought Smibert to Boston in the first place—Berkeley's Bermuda Plan—intended they should) and join in the British cultivation of the land implied in town and sheep alike. As the sheep indicate, they also will continue to be consumers of British textiles, while Bostonians will produce wool in America as well as engage in transatlantic maritime trade and consumption.⁶⁸

Decades later, another American artist, Charles Willson Peale, offered a more politicized version of Smibert's vision, in his allegorical painting of John Beale Bordley (1770).⁶⁹ The contrast between the two paintings shows the added political importance given to American production of goods (like wool) during and after the imperial political crises. Bordley, a colonial lawyer and Peale's patron, points to a statue of Liberty holding scales of justice, with a torn legal document on the ground beside him symbolizing British violation of legal liberties. Growing at the statue's base is one of America's indigenous plants—the poisonous jimsonweed—symbolizing either the poisoning of Liberty, or the dire effect violating liberty must have, or both. Bordley stands in front of a background depicting his Maryland plantation, with a peach tree, packhorse, and sheep signifying American plenty, expansion, and ultimate ability to compete with Britain in manufacture as well as agricultural production. Bordley wears a suit of homespun, making the presence of the sheep, and their denotation of American textile production all the more pointed a political message. By 1773, the productive promise of wool and silk textile production hinted at in Bordley's portrait and the APS's Silk Society was becoming trumpeted in less than subtle terms. In the 1773 poem "A Prophecy of the Future Glory of America," for example, the poet looked ahead at America's future, much like the 1771 almanac writer who took two "imperial Americans" to London in 1994. This poet aggrandized the hints Bordley and Franklin gave about American wool and silk production a few years earlier into rhapsodic verse claiming that "NO land gives more employment to the loom" than America, where posterity will find "The silkworm's thread interweaving with the fleece."⁷⁰ Future America, in other words, had overtaken Britain as the world's supplier of textiles. Tellingly, they had triumphed as producers of textiles that symbolized both British profit and metropolitan production (wool) and colonial promise (silk). No other type of production and trade could better symbolize America's triumph over the empire of commerce.

The dual economic and symbolic importance of Britain's textile manufactures was precisely what made colonial boycotts of them during the imperial crises, and the adoption of homespun as political protest, so effective.⁷¹ When Franklin testified before Parliament during the Stamp Act Crisis that "with a little industry" Americans could make cloth "at home," it struck at the heart of the British empire of commerce (or, perhaps more properly, but as importantly, at perceptions about the role of colonial consumption in that empire). When Franklin wrote to Collinson about Button-mold Bay, sheep, trade, and manufacture, and then when he backed the APS's Silk Society, he tapped into the same idea about America's future within the British Empire that Smibert and Peale both celebrated visually; the same idea Thomas Paine made famous over a decade later discussing politics in *Common Sense*, the idea that "there is something absurd, in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island."⁷² Consumption, production, and social and political development, all, ultimately, proved to hold different possibilities in a British Empire planted on the North American continent.

From the 1720s through the 1770s, many Americans were more than content—they were, in fact, extremely proud—to be part of the British Empire. Even when insisting that they held a special place within it, they celebrated the empire and gladly consumed its goods. Between the end of King George's War and the start of the Revolution, however, events occurred that shook American confidence in the British Empire.⁷³ From the return of Louisbourg to France at the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748 (a European diplomatic decision that outraged New Englanders, who termed it an "insult"), to the British military mocking their colonial counterparts in the French and Indian War, from the political decisions embodied in the imperial crises of the 1760s and 1770s, from the Sugar Act to Lexington and Concord, events occurred that inspired some Americans—not all, but enough—to shift their thinking about America's place in the British Empire. Joseph Warren put it aptly in his 1775 address on the anniversary of one of those altering events. Speaking on the anniversary of the Boston Massacre, Warren described "the Colonist." Warren opined that, before the events of the 1770s, this everyman colonist "knew indeed that by purchasing the manufactures of Great Britain he contributed to its greatness: he knew that all the wealth which his labor produced centered in Great Britain; but *that*, far from exciting his envy, filled him with the highest pleasure; *that* he thought supported him in all his toils." Indeed, so much did "the Colonist" love the British Empire, that "his elevated fancy led him to foretell, with a kind of enthusiastic confidence, the glory, power, and duration of an Empire which shou'd extend from one end of the earth to the other." But, as the fictional American travellers in 1994 also remembered, however, this happy participation in a glorious empire of commerce was destroyed by British politics in the 1760s and 1770s, so that "civil war" was tearing the empire apart.⁷⁴ In the face of this upheaval, one of the protest mechanisms adopted by people like "the Colonist" was to eschew "purchasing the manufactures of Great Britain." Strengthening the power of such consumption-based protest was the accompanying emphasis on colonial production; "the Colonist" would produce goods as well as refuse to consume them.

When political protest grew heated in the 1760s and 1770s, the theme of America's continental expansion and colonial production grew louder. In 1768, a Boston almanac published "A Speech by the Goddess Liberty" that echoed Berkeley's poem and

Popple's map from decades before: "Lo! Swarming westward on rejoicing suns, / See COLONIES extend."⁷⁵ By 1774, a year that proved a tipping point in the imperial crises, continental expansion was being explicitly foretold as the future of America. Indeed, wrote the author of the unabashedly named poem, "A Prophecy of the Future Glory of America," Americans, with their "increasing commerce," would reach all the way to the Pacific. Moreover, they would overtake British production of goods (including ever-important textiles), for "A day will come" when "through new channels sailing, we shall clothe / The Californian coast, and all the realms / That stretch from Anian's Streights [sic] to proud Japan."⁷⁶ Protesting colonists embraced the old imperial idea about continental expansion for their own. They returned to a vision of the continent more akin to Popple's map than the one drawn after the Proclamation Line of 1763 in which they theoretically lived. At moments of most heated protest, they made this appropriation of continental empire clear, in poems like "A Prophecy of the Future Glory of America," and in the naming of their Congress and Army; both, of course, sharing the name of "continental." They also asserted their rights and destiny to be traders and producers—and of textiles, that most symbolic of British goods, no less.

In 1774, another literary piece made explicit links between the continent and America's destiny to be an empire that would be "the glory and astonishment of the whole earth":

AMERICANS! Look eastward, and westward, northward, and southward—the stores of nature, and the blessings of the universe, are ready to pour into your happy land—The friendly ocean flows round you, and your countless ports are open to the four winds of Heaven.—The inspiring voice of LIBERTY echoes from province to province, and her animating spirit kindles from the city to the country, and flashes like lightning through the distant regions of your vast Continent. The time is coming, when the knee of empires and splendid kingdoms will bow to your greatness and supplicate favour of your liberal and peerless Majesty . . .⁷⁷

Albeit dramatically, this piece, "The Address of AMERICA'S GENIUS, to the PEOPLE in the AMERICAN WORLD," makes it clear that themes about the place of America in the British Empire were on the brink of undergoing a fundamental shift to becoming an American empire in an "American World." America was poised to reach (or at least to strive to reach) its potential as the site of an empire of commerce, an empire of the seas, an empire of liberty, and a continental empire; a land of producers as well as consumers.

John Murrin compellingly argues that, "Britain may actually have lost her colonies because, in the last analysis, the English simply did not know how to think triumphantly."⁷⁸ Americans, on the other hand, had no such problem.⁷⁹ Whether in 1745, 1776, or—and this is one thing that the pre-revolutionary almanac writer got right about the twentieth century, even if he missed the mark on London—1994, Americans were able to think triumphantly, particularly about empire. Such thoughts had deep roots, among thinkers on both sides of the Atlantic. In the triumphantly named poem "AMERICAN INVINCIBLE," the author recalls the special history of Americans in a British empire of liberty and empire of the seas, recounting how: "For LIBERTY they left their native plain, / Plowing the waves, they dar'd the raging

main.” Once in America, the colonists faced challenges unknown across the Atlantic as they sought “this land where wildest horrors rose, / And savage Indians were their ruthless foes,” pushing west from the coast against Native Americans as they “First beat the thickets with unweari’d pain” and then “Subdu’d the soil the earnest their gain” to establish settlements and produce merchantable commodities to enrich the empire of commerce. By 1779, in the midst of the Revolution, it was clear to Patriots that the British Empire had, as the American travellers saw in 1994, moved to America, where “we may see Great Britain’s glory rise / In a new world, beneath these western skies.”⁸⁰ Heir to decades of thinking about empire in America, such Revolutionary ideas about triumphant empire would find even greater currency in the early republic, when an “empire of liberty” based on domestic production and continental expansion would rise in earnest, with consequences as tragic as they were triumphant.

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NOTES

- 1 “Curious REMARKS by North-American Travellers, in 1994,” in *The Universal American Almanack, or Yearly Magazine* . . . (Philadelphia: William Evitt, at the Bible-in-Heart, in Strawberry-Alley, opposite the Bull’s Head Tavern, 1771).
- 2 George Berkeley, “Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America” (1726), in Alexander Campbell Fraser, *The Works of George Berkeley, D.D. formerly Bishop of Cloyne* . . . (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1871), 366; Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), Book IV, chapter 7.
- 3 Smibert’s notebook, reproduced in Andrew Oliver, ed., *The Notebook of John Smibert* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1969), 99–100.
- 4 Oliver, ed., *The Notebook of John Smibert*, 99–100; Jason Shaffer, “Making ‘An Excellent Die’: Death, Mourning, and Patriotism in the Propaganda Plays of the American Revolution,” in *Early American Literature* 41(1) (2006), 1–27; David S. Shields discusses the poem (and its larger political and literary context) in *Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America, 1690–1750* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), see 105.
- 5 Ned Landsman discusses the prevalence of ideas about an American site of empire from Berkeley to Smith in the Epilogue to *From Colonials to Provincials: American Thought and Culture 1680–1760* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 176–80.
- 6 On Anglicization, see the work of John Murrin, for example, “The Legal Transformation: The Bench and Bar if Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts,” in Stanley N. Katz, John M. Murrin, and Douglas Greenberg, eds., *Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Development* (New York: Routledge, 2010); and John M. Murrin and David S. Silverman, “The Quest for America: Reflections on Distinctiveness, Pluralism, and Public Life,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33 (2002), 235–46. On Americanization and differences between metropolitan and colonial expectation and experience of empire, see Jack P. Greene, *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States, 1607–1788* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986); Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy, eds., *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500–1820* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution*

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CHAPTER THREE

SLAVERY AND THE CAUSES OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION IN PLANTATION BRITISH AMERICA



Trevor Burnard

I

Only a minority of British American colonies joined Massachusetts in revolt against Britain in July 1776. Depending on how you count colonies, there were either 27 or 31 colonies in British America when Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. Only thirteen contiguous colonies in British North America needed to explain why they had dissolved “the political bonds” connecting them to Britain and justify why they claimed “the separate and equal status to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them.” Colonies north of New Hampshire and colonies in the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean stayed loyal to Britain. This loyalty was what British ministers expected. In particular, they assumed that all colonies in which slavery was the primary social and economic institution would be too afraid of slave rebellion and were too dependent on British troops to risk making grandiloquent assertions of liberty. Slavery would keep these “yelp[er]s after liberty,” as Samuel Johnson contemptuously described American planters, quiescent.¹ What surprised ministers was not that so few British American colonies joined Massachusetts in armed rebellion, but that the people of Boston and its surroundings were able to attract so much support from southern colonies where the social structure was radically different from the relatively poor and homogeneously white social structure of the American North. They expected the empire to divide over revolution, but expected the break in the imperial “snake,” as depicted in Benjamin Franklin’s famous woodcut “Join or Die,” to occur further north along the chain of colonies than it in fact did.

This chapter explores why the break in the colonial chain of colonies occurred as far south as it did, and it explores what it meant for the plantation societies of colonial British America that the break happened between the northern and southern halves of slave societies, rather than somewhere near the Mason–Dixon line—the line that marked the major political dividing line in the independent United States before the American Civil War. This question is hardly unexplored. Nevertheless, it is a question whose answer is usually invested with a degree of teleological determinism. Historians usually ask why the southern mainland colonies joined the rebellion

as if this result was foreordained rather than a result that careful contemporary observers had every reason to think unlikely, especially in South Carolina and Georgia, where slave populations were large.² Historians also look at the plantation colonies of the British West Indies during the American Revolution and ask why these colonies stayed loyal, rather than explore whether they might have joined the Revolution.³

I examine this question by reversing these assumptions, paying particular attention to South Carolina and Jamaica as the colonies whose choice of loyalty in the War for American Independence could most easily have been made differently. If fear of slave rebellion was so determinative of British West Indian attitudes during the American Revolution, making them loyal even when they were sympathetic to American republican ideology, why did such fear not also force South Carolina to stay loyal? Conversely, if, as is increasingly historical orthodoxy, South Carolina was impelled into revolution precisely because it wanted to control its slave population and doubted British intentions in this respect, why did similar assumptions not work in Jamaica and encourage Jamaican planters to join the rebellion?

These are not minor questions. That Virginia would join the revolution is reasonably explicable. Republican sentiment was very strong in Virginia; the planter elite wanted to assert their moral authority against the British government as a way of shoring up support for their political rule among restless poorer whites; and economic distress had made Virginians anxious about the harm that British actions were doing to their economy. South Carolina's revolutionary orientation makes less obvious sense. South Carolina's decision, however, to join its northern brethren was momentous both in how the War of Independence ended up, and also in the resulting commitment of the United States to black chattel slavery as a constitutionally-approved institution. Although South Carolinian planters and merchants may have had their doubts about the wisdom of their decision to join northern rebels during the War of Independence, given the viciousness of warfare in the South, its decline into internecine civil war, and the massive disruption that war created within the plantation economy and within the slave system, the rightness of their decision to rebel was confirmed by events after the Revolution, when they consolidated their power within the new state and nation, and when the institution of slavery was made a central support of American republicanism. Jamaican planters, on the other hand, had reason to regret their choice to stay loyal, as their loyalty was rewarded, as they saw it, by British betrayal, as abolitionism moved from being a minor to major social movement from the mid 1780s.⁴

My principal contention in this chapter, and one that is at odds both with current historical orthodoxy and with the assumptions that British governors made about the political options open to planters in societies with large slave populations, is that planters were less incapacitated by fear of what slaves might do to them if they rebelled than is commonly supposed. That they had a wary worry about slave violence is clear. So, too, it is clear that enslaved people took advantage of the fog of war to pursue their own agendas at the expense of planters during the War for Independence.⁵ In the end, however, planters were not paralysed by fear of slave rebellion, especially before the events in Saint Domingue in the first few years of the nineteenth century showed planters the capacity of black soldiers to effect serious damage to planters' property and persons.⁶ In 1776, British American planters had no reason to think that a slave rebellion, of which there had been remarkably few

in British American history, and only one (Tacky's revolt in Jamaica in 1760) that had posed a significant threat to planter power, would not be easily overcome. A slave rebellion, even a serious one, was part and parcel of plantation life, similar as a disruptive event to a hurricane, and, like a hurricane, it was an event that caused temporary disturbance, rather than being a threat to the very viability of plantation systems.

At bottom, why Jamaica, Barbados, and Antigua chose to be loyal, and why Virginia, Maryland, Georgia, and South Carolina decided to join with the rebels in Massachusetts, is due to hard-headed calculations about whether British actions were sufficiently outrageous that they compromised planter's wealth, autonomy, and heightened sense of their own liberty. In the West Indies, planters chose to stay loyal because their anger over British actions was not especially pronounced, their relationship with Britain was more satisfactory than in the thirteen colonies, their economies were booming, the number of residents who were born in Britain (and who continued to have connections in the metropolis) was very high, and because they believed that the costs of rebelling far outweighed any gains. In the Chesapeake and South Carolina, by contrast, planters were not only convinced that British actions were attacks on their liberty, autonomy, and independence, but they were also sure that, if they did not resist these attacks, they would be reduced to the abject slavery that they made their own slaves suffer. The causes for Revolution remain, in my view, constitutional rather than derived from racial, class, or sectional conflicts. Large slave populations and resentful Indian populations played a part in shaping political leaders' decisions about whether to decide for or against rebellion, but more important than these considerations was republican ideology and constitutional concerns about the extent to which British actions were violating customary constitutional assumptions.⁷

II

On October 26, 1775, William Henry Lyttleton, Member of Parliament for Bewdley and a former governor of both South Carolina and Jamaica, and thus a man with expertise and experience with the psychology of planters and the nature of plantation society in British America, gave a notorious speech to the House of Commons. Foreshadowing what John Murray, Lord Dunmore, the last royal Governor of Virginia, was going to do just two and a half weeks later, Lyttleton outlined a strategy whereby the southern and island colonies of British America could be isolated from the northern colonies.⁸ Comparing the thirteen colonies to a chain, he noted that the most northern colonies, with their abundance of white residents, were the part of the chain least likely to break under British pressure to reform. The weaker parts of the chain, Lyttleton suggested, were those that corresponded to the southern colonies of South Carolina and Georgia, where the white population was close to being outnumbered by the black enslaved population.

Making an implicit criticism of the futility of the Coercive Acts as a means of bringing Massachusetts to heel,⁹ Lyttleton argued that Britain should concentrate on separating the vulnerable southern colonies from their alliance with northern colonies. He was convinced that Britain could turn the racial demography of the southern colonies against rebellion. South Carolina and Georgia, he believed, were paralysed

by fear of what their enslaved population might do to them if given the chance. Lyttleton suggested that Britain should use British troops stationed in America to stand firm against outbreaks of settler patriotism. He argued that a few regiments should be sent to the southern colonies of British North America, which were weak “on account of the number of negroes in them,” with the understanding that “the negroes would rise, and embrue their hands in the blood of their masters.” Moreover, he advocated that these troops be augmented by using rebel slaves who had run away from their plantations, and by exploiting the military obligations of the few free people of color in the two colonies, he believed that southern planters were so afraid of slave rebellion that a show of force on the British side, especially if it included a touch of racial antagonism, would quickly bring the southern provinces to heel. This view was commonly shared. The most prominent patriot in the colony, and the leader of Charlestown’s Sons of Liberty, Christopher Gadsden, had expressed concern about South Carolina’s ability to support its northern brethren given the threat that the large enslaved population of South Carolina posed to the colony’s security. Writing to Boston radical Samuel Adams, Gadsden admitted that South Carolina was “a weak Colony from the Number of Negroes we have amongst us and therefore exposed to more formidable Ministerial Tricks.”¹⁰

Lyttleton’s idea was a prime example of such a ministerial trick.¹¹ The large slave population in the southern colonies could be used as a means of causing divisions within British North America. His idea was not taken up by his fellow members of parliament in London.¹² By the time news of the speech had reached Charlestown, however, news of the even more inflammatory proclamations made by Lord Dunmore in neighboring Virginia had greatly alarmed white Southerners. Faced by increasing numbers of rebel forces, Dunmore had pre-empted the political process by declaring war against the patriots on November 7, 1775. A week later, he promised freedom to the slaves of rebels who might run away from their masters and join the royal cause. Hundreds of slaves defected to Dunmore, allowing him to form and arm a Royal Ethiopian Regiment.¹³ South Carolinians were doubly worried because they had just foiled, or so they believed, a potential slave insurrection in June 1775, which they argued had been developed into a conspiracy by a wealthy free black ship pilot, Thomas Jeremiah. Jeremiah had been tried, convicted, and executed, the execution (hanging followed by a public burning of the body) occurring on August 18, 1775.¹⁴

Lyttleton’s plan was ingenious but likely to backfire, which may have been the reason it was not taken seriously in London, even if it was taken seriously in the colonies. Several historians, most notably Robert Olwell and Woody Holton, have argued that rumors of British attempts to stir up enslaved people and Native Americans, so that they would take up arms against South Carolinian and Virginian planters, merely confirmed planter beliefs in ministerial wickedness. It firmed up their conviction that the best way to protect their investment in slavery was to join rebellion against a government that seemed to threaten the continuation of slavery in the South. What Lyttleton was suggesting, and what Dunmore soon after proposed, was ample confirmation that their fears about British ministerial intentions were correct.¹⁵

But one can understand why Lyttleton thought the way that he did, given his personal history as governor of two of Britain’s important plantation colonies. Between 1756 and 1760, Lyttleton had been governor of South Carolina, where his time had been largely taken up with dealing with the threat that Cherokees posed

to the colony's security. In 1762, Lyttleton transferred to Jamaica where he had an unpleasant time, being involved in an acrimonious dispute with the Jamaica Assembly over questions of privileges. Lyttleton ended up on the wrong side of this dispute, being recalled to London in 1766, with the planters triumphant.¹⁶

His tumultuous governorship of Jamaica was overshadowed, however, by events that occurred just before his arrival. In May 1760, Jamaica was rocked by the most serious slave conspiracy in its history, Tacky's revolt, an island-wide slave rebellion that probably came close to destroying white rule on the island. The revolt was skillfully put down by the Jamaican-born governor, Henry Moore, who in 1765 followed Lyttleton's public service career in reverse, moving to New York just in time for the Stamp Act riots, where he was largely successful in steering a cautious path between satisfying American radicals and doing the responsibilities of a British colonial governor. Moore and his fellow Jamaicans responded to the defeat of Tacky and other slave rebels with a ferocity that appalled metropolitan observers, torturing to death dozens of the principal conspirators and transporting hundreds of others to the Mosquito Coast. For the next few years, Jamaicans reworked their laws so as to prevent such an event from occurring again and concerned themselves intently with security issues, spending vast sums on rebuilding fortifications, agreeing to pay for large numbers of imperial troops to be sent to the island, and looking nervously at their tenuous relationship with Jamaica's two communities of Maroons (independent African-American societies which occupied Jamaica's mountainous interior)—their ostensible allies, but allies that white Jamaicans knew could easily turn into formidable enemies.¹⁷

Tacky's revolt came as a surprise to Jamaican planters, but not to British governors. The most impressive mid-eighteenth century Jamaican governor, Edward Trelawney, had assumed that white Jamaicans would eventually destroy themselves through their reckless over-stocking of slaves in a plantation economy where excessive mortality meant that the white population increased only marginally decade to decade. Moreover, like most governors of Jamaica, he lamented the Creole residents' inattention to defense matters and thought their military abilities, as manifested in colonial militias, were shockingly poor. His main concern, however, was with Jamaicans' slave management practices. In secret memoranda to the Board of Trade, he argued against allowing slavery to be introduced into the Mosquito Coast, a Central American possession of Britain that had been taken from the Spaniards, and which was essentially a colony of Jamaica because the institution of slavery there would follow the Jamaican pattern and would attract Jamaicans who were eager to become planters, but who lacked the resources to do so in Jamaica itself. Experience showed, he believed, that Jamaicans were the worst slave managers in the world: cruel and careless in equal measure. Expanding slavery outside the island would almost ensure a slave revolt, especially in a small, isolated beachhead on the Spanish Main, surrounded by Spanish colonies only too eager to cause harm to the British Empire by provoking mistreated slaves into rebellion.¹⁸

Trelawney also expressed his misgivings about British slaveholding in the colonies in a prescient 1746 publication, *An Essay Concerning Slavery*. The essay was written anonymously, but recent research suggests that the author was the Jamaican governor.¹⁹ Trelawney warned white Jamaicans of the likely consequences of relying too heavily upon an expanding slave population in a society where there were fewer

than 10,000 whites and approximately 100,000 slaves, with thousands more arriving each year in the booming Atlantic slave trade. There were too many slaves in proportion to white settlers, the author argued, and “If some Stop [were] not . . . put to” the “Rage that Planters have for buying Negroes” and better “Care or Conduct . . . used in the Management of them, the Island must be over-run, and ruined by its own Slaves.” It was no surprise, therefore, that planters were “not only alarm’d by every trifling Armament, but under the greatest Apprehension frequently from their own Slaves.”²⁰

Trelawney’s principal concern was with the security of white settlers. Not only did they buy too many Africans for comfort, they were driven by “a narrow Selfishness, and total Unconcern for every Thing that doth not regard their immediate Interest,” and they took far “too little Care to manage these Negroes.” Their recklessness meant that they were “playing with Edge-Tools, which they could not manage.” They needed legislation because they “should be prevented from cutting themselves.” But Trelawney also speculated on the effect of such actions on enslaved people. He presumed that Africans would eventually not stand for how badly they were treated: “Are Men’s Lives so to be sported with? Are Men to be so much at the Mercy of another Man? Are the lives of human Creatures, I say, to be play’d with in such a Manner, such as a giddy thoughtless Planter thinks fit?” Planters thought, he argued, that Africans did not care for liberty as much as did Britons. They thought that “Negroes are not of the same Species with us, but that being of a different Mold and Nature, as well as Colour, they were made intirely for our Use, with Instincts proper to the Purpose, having as great a Propensity to Subjection, as we have to command, and loving Slavery as naturally as we do Liberty.” Sarcasm dripped from the pen: how could Britons “who know the Value of Liberty, who prize it above Life,” believe such foolish notions? Britain needed to stop the slave trade to the British colonies so that Jamaica did not become torn apart by a massive slave conflagration.²¹

Tacky’s revolt in Jamaica in 1760 seemed the fulfillment of Trelawney’s warnings. It seemed to confirm that plantation societies in the Americas were inherently unstable and that eventually they would succumb to slave rebellion. Events in Dutch Berbice in 1763–4, where slave rebels not only seized the reins of government but also kept European forces and white planters at bay for several years, seemed to show the inexorable direction in which the plantation system was heading.²² The violence of the slave system, it was thought, sowed the seeds of its own destruction. The future was apocalypse. Sooner or later intrepid slaves would throw off their chains, kill their masters, and transform the plantation social structure so that the plantations would be destroyed and barbaric (to European minds, at least) African kingdoms would be established. The apocalyptic vision was put forward most graphically in the great bestseller of the 1770s, Abbé Raynal’s *Histoire philosophique et politique des deux Indes*. In sections probably written by Denis Diderot, claims were made that all humans needed to be treated with dignity, and that the injustice of the slave system was such that inevitably a black Spartacus would arise to wreak bloody vengeance on the planters who mistreated their slaves so badly. Many other Europeans believed that slave rebellion was bound to come. In 1737, for example, Samuel Johnson’s friend, Richard Savage, wrote a poem about West Indian slavery in which he sympathized with “Afric’s sable Children,” inflicted with “nameless

Tortures.” He ended the poem with a blood-curdling (to white West Indians, at least) prediction that “yoke may Yoke, and Blood may repay.”²³

Contemporary historians have tended to accept this essentially eschatological reading of the inevitability (and the rightness) of slave rebellion. It is a matter of faith among modern historians that enslaved people never accepted their lot, that they resisted and rebelled whenever they could, and that, when given half a chance, they “grasped the opportunity to escape and live in freedom.”²⁴ In this reading, the Age of Revolutions not only placed slavery on the ultimate road to extinction, even if that road was paved with many false turnings before the end of the road was reached. It also was an age in which enslaved people, as intensely interested in philosophical and political debates about the nature of liberty as were their masters and mistresses, used the opportunity of revolutionary ferment in the Atlantic world to advance their own freedom. Planters, therefore, were “playing with edge-tools,” to use Trelawney’s phrase, when they not only talked about abstract ideals of liberty, but also attempted to put those ideals into action.

Resistance against slavery by slaves is taken by most historians of both slavery and also of the American Revolution in the South and the Caribbean as a given. They imbue slaves with higher values than those that their masters’ presupposed. Philip Morgan, for example argues, in a major work on Southern slavery, which ends with a treatment of the revolutionary period, that what slaves wanted was to oppose the dehumanization inherent in their status and to “force masters to recognise their humanity.” With this “independence,” slaves could create an autonomous culture that reflected their “cultural creativity.” Slaves, he averred, had “an unquenchable human spirit” despite the “psychic toll” that “the unbridled domination and naked exploitation” inherent of slavery wrought on them. He concluded: “Subject to grinding daily exploitation, caught in the grip of powerful forces that were often beyond their power to control, slaves nevertheless strove to create order in their lives, to preserve their humanity, to achieve dignity, and to sustain dreams of a better future.”²⁵

For Ira Berlin, the revolutionary years in the Americas gave blacks “new leverage” in their perpetual struggle against their owners, the war offering them “new opportunities to challenge both the institution of chattel bondage and the allied structures of white supremacy.”²⁶ The Haitian Revolution, in particular, proved that one could not keep enslaved people down forever. The brutality of the St. Domingue slave system meant that it could not last. As Franklin Knight argues, “a system like the Caribbean slave system bore within itself the seeds of its own destruction and therefore could not last indefinitely.” Indeed, historians are inspired by the Haitian Revolution to make extravagant claims for its world importance. Laurent Dubois, for example, claims that “If we live in a world where democracy is meant to exclude no-one, it is no small part because of the actions of those slaves in Saint-Domingue who insisted that human rights were theirs too.” For Robin Blackburn, who makes the most powerful argument for the international importance of the Haitian Revolution as “a triumph for the revolutionary concept of ‘the rights of man’,” the “Haitian Revolution channelled mass longing for freedom into a ban on slavery” and resulted from slaves’ instinctive realization that “individual resistance was limited and very risky, such that the freedom they sought could not be won without collective support.”²⁷

This growing consensus over what enslaved people wanted from life—freedom at any cost, and a freedom that is remarkably similar to twenty-first-century liberal democratic conceptions of what freedom means—and an increasing assumption that any revolution in the Age of Revolutions can be largely measured by whether blacks achieved or did not achieve freedom, has had considerable implications for the historiography of the causes and consequences of the American Revolution and of the War for American Independence in the plantation colonies of British America. At the same time that the Haitian Revolution is lavishly praised as the fulfillment of the most radical impulses of the revolutionary spirit,²⁸ the Southern leaders of the American Revolution are increasingly faulted for their hesitance in following through on the logic of revolution to extend liberty to “all men.” They are also criticized for failing to act on the principle that if every person was “created equal” then the proper task of revolution was to abolish slavery.

From this consensus, a number of conclusions follow. First, just as Lyttleton and Dunmore assumed, fear of slave rebellion must be of paramount importance in the thinking of Southern and West Indian planters in deciding on revolution.²⁹ Second, the revolution must have destabilized slave systems throughout British America, mainly due to the actions of slaves themselves in creating rebellions, engaging in resistance and, for the first time, devising intellectual ideologies of antislavery and African-American identity.³⁰ Third, the American Revolution might have set in train the beginnings of abolitionism not just in North America but also in Britain and possibly France.³¹ Fourth, the American Revolution should be judged on what it achieved for black people, rather than on what it achieved for white men.³² Finally, in creating the conditions whereby Jefferson’s dream of an Empire for Liberty became in reality an expanding empire of slavery, the American Revolution can be seen as a failure.³³ That failure was not immediately apparent, as the succession of Virginia and New England presidents tried fitfully to live up to the emancipatory possibilities of the American Revolution in the first fifty years after the Declaration of Independence. But the failure was made manifest in the election of Andrew Jackson, now seen not as the inaugurator of democratic politics, but instead as an especially egregious example of the worst type of Southern racist planter and Indian hater.³⁴

III

The problem with stirring words about the “unquenchable human spirit” of slaves who exhibited a widespread “quest for individual and collective freedom,” and who only needed a “spark” from the “altar of 1776” to initiate their eventually successful aspirations for universal rights is that there is little evidence, first, that slave resistance was especially widespread either before, during, or after the Age of Revolutions, or, second, that planters were as concerned about slave revolt as contemporary British ministers or modern historians imagine them to be.

The extent of slave rebellion in eighteenth-century British America was not great. Historians have tried very hard to find slave rebellions but they have not found many that significantly interrupted colonial life. Some important colonies, such as Virginia, Maryland, and Barbados had no slave rebellions in the eighteenth century. South Carolina was relatively free from slave revolts, with the only one of consequence occurring in 1739, when a force of somewhat less than 100 slaves rebelled,

killed between 20 and 30 whites and fought a pitched battle with militia, which they lost comprehensively. Perhaps 200 slaves lost their lives as a result of the conflict. The Stono Rebellion terrified whites in Charleston, but it never posed a major threat to the security of the colony. Indeed, its most important effect was to shore up the slave system, with lawmakers in the following year devising an extremely harsh slave code that gave planters near total power over slave property. Four years earlier, a slave conspiracy in Antigua was discovered before it was to go into effect. It had the potential, if it had actually occurred, to destabilize this small island, but, as with most slave rebellions, it was stopped before it started. Easily the biggest and most dangerous slave revolt was Tacky's revolt in Jamaica, when thousands of slaves in several parts of the island erupted into rebellion, killing a considerable number of whites, torching plantations and imperiling the very safety of the island. Unlike Stono, it was subdued only with great difficulty and through the Jamaican state using a combination of local white militia, British sailors and soldiers, and Maroons to overwhelm slaves.³⁵

That slaves rebelled at all is remarkable, given the ferocity with which slave rebellions were put down by white planters able to exploit the full panoply of state-sanctioned violence on their behalf. But they seldom rebelled often enough to cause planters serious concern. By 1776, no planter in Virginia or Barbados, and virtually no South Carolinian planter except for long-lived planters with long memories, would have experienced slaves taking collective action against them. Even in Jamaica, where there were a series of small rebellions in the late seventeenth century, another small rebellion in 1765 and a foiled slave conspiracy in 1776, and the major revolt of 1760, long periods—the first sixty years of the eighteenth century, for example—passed without a slave revolt. The Age of Revolutions, moreover, did not see rebellions increase. Indeed, as David Geggus has pointed out, the frequency of rebellions and conspiracies in the British Caribbean reached an all-time low between 1776 and 1815. During the American Revolution itself, the British Caribbean was particularly quiescent, despite suffering hardship and famine as a result of the disruption of supplies from North America after 1778 and multiple hurricanes in the 1780s. Slaves took advantage of the war in the American South to run away in large numbers, and they made small gains in the nature of their working lives, gains that were quickly destroyed as violence on the plantations dramatically increased in the immediate post-war period, when planters sought successfully to restore traditional patterns of control and deference. But no slave rebellions occurred in the midst of planter disarray and slave hardship. The closest slaves got to rebellion were a few quickly discovered and harshly punished conspiracies in 1774 and 1775 that may or may not have been more than rumor.³⁶

Nevertheless, even a rumor of a slave conspiracy was enough to cause slave owners great concern. An actual slave revolt, such as Tacky's Revolt in 1760, caused "great Terror and Consternation." Thomas Thistlewood, a slave overseer who had been caught in the middle of the Revolt, and whose Jamaican diary provides graphic evidence of how terrifying a slave revolt could be for white people, gave some idea of how much slave owners feared slave insurrection. He was convinced that it was only good fortune that had prevented slaves from achieving their aim: to set fires "in many places at once," so that "all the Whites who Come to help Extinguish them, were to be Murdered in the Confusion." He thought that another revolt would

soon follow. Dining with a fellow overseer in October 1760, he was told by his companion of an old proverb “which frights many people: One thousand seven hundred and sixty three, Jamaica no more an Island shall be (not for the whites).”³⁷

Those colonists who had not experienced a major slave revolt were sometimes inclined to downplay the horror of such an event. Barbadians, for example, had been “so long exempted from insurrections,” that they “do not appear to harbour any considerable suspicions on that head,” and they felt “but little of that corporeal dread of blacks which seems to pervade some of the islands.”³⁸ Jamaicans were not so complacent. They continued to worry about slave revolt during the 1760s and 1770s. Indeed, they used their fear of slave revolt as an ostensible reason not to join with North Americans in rebellion. In words that echoed what their *bête noir*, William Henry Lyttleton, was to express a year later, the Jamaica Assembly noted in a formal petition to the British Crown protesting British actions in British North America, that they could not express their discontent as violently as colonists were doing on the mainland because their fear of slave rebellion and their dependence on British defence had reduced them to such a “weak and feeble” state that they could not offer physical resistance.³⁹

One should not overestimate, however, the extent to which Jamaicans and other Americans were paralysed by fear of slave rebellion. Jamaica was quite willing to resist British authority and to express its hostility to British actions in forthright language when it wanted to do so. When the Board of Trade remonstrated with Jamaica about legislation passed in the immediate aftermath of Tacky, the Jamaican Assembly was indignant in its reply. The Assembly declared that “they are by no means disposed to submit their sentiments to the determination of their lordships nor ever will, at any time, suffer them in any respect to direct or influence their proceedings whatsoever.” The language that it used in the extensive controversy between the Assembly and Lyttleton in the mid-1760s was similarly extreme and uncompromising. Nicholas Bourke’s dazzling defense of settler rights against royal authority contrasted Jamaicans as “men zealous for the constitution and liberties of their country” with Lyttleton’s supposed support for “the absurd and slavish Doctrines of DIVINE and HEREDITARY RIGHT and PASSIVE OBEDIENCE and NON-RESISTANCE.”⁴⁰

Moreover, Jamaicans had little reason to think that a slave rebellion had much chance of being successful. Tacky had shocked them, but the rebellion was put down with maximum violence, and the measures instigated in the aftermath of Tacky to keep slaves in check and to ensure white solidarity were remarkably effective in keeping whites in Jamaica safe. White Jamaicans experienced a number of revolts after Tacky and before the Declaration of Independence, but they had put them down easily, bloodily, and with relatively little loss of white life. As far as Jamaicans were concerned, violent repression worked, at least so far as it killed those slaves prepared to rebel and gave to other slaves contemplating rebellion a stark warning of the torments that awaited them if they rebelled. Slaves contemplating rebellion did so, therefore, in the knowledge both that their enterprise was likely to fail and also that the result of failure would be a grisly death by slow torture. Given the small likelihood that a slave revolt would succeed, slaves who rebelled were therefore opting for a form of self-destruction. Many more slaves chose not to seek self-destruction through rebellion, but instead sought release from enslavement through

suicide. Thistlewood recorded ten suicides in his diaries between 1768 and 1782, making suicide the leading cause of recorded slave deaths next to infectious disease.⁴¹

Militarily trained colonial governors were contemptuous of the martial spirit of white Jamaicans, while civilian governors found Jamaican methods of slave management highly deficient. But white Jamaicans were sufficiently martial and well-disciplined to be able to cow their slaves into submission. One of the primary explanations for white success at keeping blacks down was their ready recourse to strategies of terror. Jamaican slavery was especially brutal even by the elevated standards of New World cruelty. Planters reveled in incorporating sadistic methods of inflicting pain and humiliation into their frequent punishments of slaves. They created a police state where whites enjoyed a form of absolutism based on their monopoly both of the coercive powers of the state, and also of the ideological advantages of having white skin. There was no pretense that whites governed through any form of consent. Indeed, blacks were imagined to be so far outside the social system that it was impossible to conceive of ways whereby any fiction that slaves consented to their treatment was possible. White Jamaicans were absolutist tyrants with a torturer's charter that allowed them to do whatever they wanted. As the historian Bryan Edwards put it, the occasional planter kindness "affords but a feeble restraint against the corrupt passions and infirmities of our nature, the hardness of avarice, the pride of power, the sallies of anger, and the thirst for revenge."⁴²

Terror worked as a strategy for controlling enslaved people. It was particularly effective as British American slave societies transformed their slave structures so that the large integrated plantation containing hundreds of slaves presided over by a small number of well-rewarded, capable, and viciously brutal white managers became the dominant institution. The first half of the century marked the nadir of black life in the Americas, with Jamaica being a notoriously brutal locus of slave activity. The plantation regime needed raw power to sustain it and planters mobilized the apparatus of coercion in the service of this new regime. Slavery had always been brutal in British America but the level of violence exercised against Africans dramatically increased as the size of slave labor forces increased.

It was not just in Jamaica that slavery became especially brutal in the first half of the eighteenth century. Ira Berlin has described this process for the Chesapeake. After 1700, Berlin explains, "Chesapeake slaves faced the pillory, whipping post, and gallows far more frequently and in far larger numbers than before." Moreover, the punishments meted out to slaves were not only cruel, but increasingly ingenious. Punishments were invented intended to humiliate and demoralize, such as when William Byrd II forced a bedwetting slave to drink a "pint of piss." In addition, there were grotesque mutilations for criminal infractions and gruesome tortures leading to executions for those slaves caught after daring to rebel.⁴³ Christopher Tomlins has shown how a similar process of debasement and dehumanization can be traced in increasingly draconian slave codes in South Carolina. Successive restatements of slave laws showed increased and almost obsessive fixation on calibrating the degree and nature of bodily penalties—whippings, burnings, mutilations, and hangings. Penalties in turn became increasingly severe. The statute of 1740 reiterated and deepened the coercive measures that the state held over slaves.⁴⁴

But it was indeed worse in the islands. Jamaica had always been an incredibly violent place. In the seventeenth century, pirates were subjected to gruesome executions

while white servants were treated with great harshness. Africans, however, got the worst of the treatment. Matters probably got worse rather than better for slaves in the early eighteenth century. Even defenders of white planters admitted that they used abnormal levels of cruelty against slaves. Planters delighted in inventing forms of torture to accompany executions. Indeed, they reverted to using method of punishment, such as castration and burning by slow fire, which had lost favor in Britain since medieval times. Moreover, slave masters went out of their way to humiliate slaves and deny them their humanity. Knowing how much importance, for example, that slaves placed on having their bodies buried intact, planters regularly destroyed their bodies by burning or beheading slaves convicted of crimes. The rector of St Catherine Parish noted in 1751 that planters' policy of seeking "to deprive [negroes] of their funeral rites by burning their dead Bodies, seems to Negroes a greater punishment than Death itself."⁴⁵ Planters used both physical terror and also the mental apparatus of terror to keep slaves firmly under control.⁴⁶

IV

The conventional explanation for why Jamaica did not rebel in 1776 is that it couldn't. Its commitment to slavery, and its geographical position as a British island in a sea surrounded by French and Spanish enemies, meant that it relied on British troops for defense to an extent unparalleled anywhere else in British America. The conventional explanation, however, is not very convincing. For many historians, the threat of slave insurrection is sufficient explanation for why Jamaica did not rebel. Planters, it is argued, thought that declaring support for the American revolutionaries would have exposed them to massive risk as numerically dominant slave populations that had shown a willingness to rise up against white power before would have taken advantage of dissension within white ranks and sought their own kind of independence.⁴⁷

Jamaica was probably less vulnerable to attack from the outside than is usually assumed.⁴⁸ The history of eighteenth-century conflict in Jamaica, and Jamaica's difficult terrain suggests that subduing rebellious forces, even when there was an army already established in the island, was difficult. The rebel slaves of 1760 were subdued with difficulty. The Maroons in the long first Maroon War, which lasted well over a decade in the 1720s and 1730s, were never beaten. Jamaica had to come to terms of peace with them in 1739, rather than force them to surrender.⁴⁹ Attacking Jamaica from the outside was even more difficult. The historical experience of European involvement in the Caribbean, especially after the advent of persistent outbreaks of yellow fever from the 1690s onwards, was that the malign disease environment was the central fact shaping geopolitics in the region. John McNeill's path-breaking study of the geopolitics of fever in the eighteenth-century Caribbean shows how intra-European armed struggles were fought mainly in landscapes undergoing rapid environmental change, and in which the impact of debilitating fevers, especially yellow fever, were the principal factors determining the outcome of events. An invading army could only succeed if the island was small, had poor fortifications, and if victory was won very quickly. If a European army was forced into a siege against determined defenders with good fortifications for any extended period, then yellow fever would do its work. The easiest way to destroy a European army in the eighteenth

century was to send it to the Caribbean. Jamaica's malign disease environment would have kept it safe, just as South Carolina's malarial environment preserved it from British takeover. Despite being an island in the Greater Antilles surrounded by Spanish and French foes who aspired to take the island over, Jamaica never suffered a successful invasion while in British hands. Indeed, when the British took Jamaica in 1655, when it was a poorly defended and sparsely populated outpost of the Spanish Empire, it was to be the last time that a European took a large island from another European power and kept its territory safe.⁵⁰

Jamaica did not rebel because it did not want to rebel, rather than because its fear of slave rebellion kept it subservient. Jamaica, unlike the North American colonies, was Loyalist in outlook, not revolutionary. One reason for its Loyalism was demographic. Jamaica was an immigrant society, where a substantial minority of the white population had been born in Britain. With so many British people in its free population, it was hardly surprising that many people identified instinctively with Britain, rather than with North America. In mid-1776, Jamaican overseer Thomas Thistlewood recorded, with approval, the toast of a fellow immigrant overseer in favor of British success against the American rebels: "John Hartnole's wish to the No: Americans. Cobweb Breeches, hedgehog Saddles, jolting Horses, Strong Roads & tedious Marches, to the Enemies of Old England."⁵¹

Loyalist sentiment went beyond a reflexive commitment to Britain, expressed in loyal addresses to the Crown and patriotic toasts. It was also reflected in antagonism to North American pretensions, especially about the assumptions of liberty held by the residents of New England. By 1776, dislike of New Englanders had grown into outright antagonism. As Isaac De Pinto, a Jamaican Jew writing in France, commented, one "only had to read the history of New England . . . to take notice of the temper and character of its inhabitants." New Englanders were "fanatics and barbarians," devoted to violence and naturally imperialist. All the lands to the south of America, including French and Spanish America, as well as Jamaica, should fear if America became independent under the control of New Englanders, because "by reason of their great population and natural hardiness," and because they were "in want of metals in general, and of bullion in particular," they would seek to "invade and subjugate Mexico and Peru."⁵²

Moreover, unlike Virginia, which was suffering economically following the credit crisis of 1772 with its wealthiest planters in particular suffering severe financial hardship,⁵³ Jamaica was prospering as never before in the crucial years leading to the Declaration of Independence. There were few economic reasons encouraging rebellion and many economic factors compelling loyalty. For white Jamaicans, the years between the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution were, as George Metcalf concluded, "a brief golden age for the plantocracy."⁵⁴ Without an especially impressive resource base (the island is small, mountainous, and not well connected to European shipping routes), it had become the leading sugar exporter in the British Empire by the early years of the eighteenth century. On the eve of the American Revolution, when individual wealth was highest, Jamaica was as important to Britain in terms of wealth as a large British county such as Lancashire or Sussex. The beneficiaries of this wealth creation were Jamaican planters. They took advantage of Jamaica's natural advantages in the production of a high value commodity export to establish a highly profitable system of slave management in which they successfully manipulated complex

agro-industrial technology, a complicated integrated trade network, and, most importantly, a brutal method of labor exploitation that ruthlessly used and discarded overworked, badly fed, and abused slaves of African descent.⁵⁵

White Jamaican planters were powerful in Jamaica in part because they had influential allies in Britain. There were perhaps as many as seventy West Indians, with Jamaicans prominent in that number, in the House of Commons. They were much more closely connected into the higher reaches of British society than were North Americans, creating a West Indian fraternity not replicated among the North American colonists. Transatlantic brokers served as essential conduits between Britain and Jamaica, facilitating Jamaican access to imperial power and ensuring the smooth transit of Jamaican produce into British ports. From the 1730s to the 1770s, the West India interest in Britain enjoyed singular success in relation to legislation involving the West Indies. The main reason for their success was that their concerns fitted well with government policy. The islands retained their preferential tariff on sugar and rum despite its costs to consumers because it conformed to prevailing mercantilist theories and because the government was convinced that the West Indian islands were essential to imperial power. That the West Indies willingly submitted to imperial policies when the North American colonies so fiercely resisted such policies also aided their case, encouraging British ministers to reward such “dutifull” colonies with discriminatory legislation.⁵⁶

South Carolina may not have had the political clout of the West Indies, but it had a similar social structure, especially in its low country area which was famously “more like a negroe country” than a European one.⁵⁷ It was also prospering economically as the Revolution approached.⁵⁸ South Carolina’s large and growing population of whites in its backcountry made a difference to calculations but the center of resistance to Britain was located in the plantation areas of the low country, areas which resembled very closely the British West Indies in socio-economic character.⁵⁹ Why, then, did South Carolina rebel when its richest and most influential residents had so much to lose from revolution? The subsequent events in the South after British invasion in 1780 were sufficient cause to make wealthy planters stay loyal in 1776. South Carolina’s plantation society was placed under severe strain as the colony descended into violent civil war and as Britain concentrated its most concerted military efforts on besieging Charleston and in disrupting South Carolina’s lucrative export trade in rice. It was only the debilitating effects of malaria on Lord Cornwallis’s troops that preserved patriots’ precarious security.⁶⁰

Constitutional issues seem to best explain South Carolinian intransigency in the early 1770s. Before 1770, South Carolina tracked Jamaica in its constitutional pretensions. In the Gadsden election controversy of 1762, South Carolinians successfully got rid of a governor they did not like, just as Jamaicans did four years later with Lyttleton. Unlike Jamaica, however, South Carolina was involved in another bitter dispute with Britain over constitutional issues in the Wilkes Fund controversy between 1769 and 1775.⁶¹ As Jack P. Greene argues, the controversy was “instrumental in bringing South Carolinian politicians to a full realization of the nature of the political challenge involved in Britain’s new colonial policy.”⁶² It was the bridge to revolution. But no such bridge developed in Jamaica. The difference between the two colonies was that in South Carolina the Wilkes Fund controversy encouraged local politicians to think hard about the imperial situation. In Jamaica, by contrast,

the constitutional concern was with local parochial politics. As Andrew O'Shaughnessy distinguishes the two parts of the British America empire in the 1770s, North Americans were concerned with the power of Parliament, while West Indians thought mostly about prerogative struggles with the Crown.⁶³

South Carolinians were not instinctive revolutionaries. They had a political culture based on a lobbying tradition that emphasized the importance of "interest" over "deference" as a basis for establishing political harmony. By contrast, Virginia had a political culture in which "deference" worked more intensively. That political culture of "interest" worked very well in South Carolina. The province's whole experience in the mid-eighteenth century had been that of a favorable child within the empire. It made South Carolina's elite leadership reluctant revolutionaries, the most conservative of all patriots. They did not share the revolutionary ideology so powerful in Virginia and Massachusetts. They came to believe by 1774, however, that the Crown was acting against South Carolina's interests.

Jamaica never shared that belief. Moreover, unlike South Carolinians, Jamaicans were never invited to join in North American Continental Congresses. It was in these inter-colonial environments that South Carolinians both encountered other colonials who had grievances against the Crown, and also where they learned that their particular kind of lobbying tradition—a tradition that encouraged South Carolinians to embrace radical behavior in which they were very willing to threaten to withdraw from negotiations if some benchmark demands were not met—worked very effectively in forcing northern delegates to acquiesce to South Carolinian positions. That position worked extremely well in 1774, when South Carolina insisted that if rice was not excluded from the list of goods that were subject to non-importation agreements, they would walk from the Continental Congress. It continued to be the South Carolinian political strategy in dealing with opposition from other colonies and states until secession in 1861.⁶⁴

In contrast to Jamaica, where the threat of slave revolt was used as an excuse to stay out of the conflict, planters in South Carolina supported independence as a way of protecting slavery from perceived British attacks.⁶⁵ Indeed, as Bob Olwell and J. William Harris argue, slavery itself provided a vital impetus in the decision towards revolution. As events would later prove, it was South Carolinians, rather than Jamaicans, who were to be proved correct in their assumptions. By declaring for revolution, white South Carolinians, despite some hair-raising moments during the Revolutionary War when slaves were a potential destabilizing threat to political survival, ensured the survival and solidification of their principal social institution. It took a Civil War, rather than metropolitan decree, for South Carolina to be forced to give up slavery.⁶⁶

V

One question remains. If fear of slave rebellion played less of a role in shaping Southern and island attitudes in the decision for revolution, surely the ideologies of republican liberty expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the clear evidence shown by slaves in their actions during the War for Independence that they thought sentiments about liberty also referred to their condition, and the example of Northern colonies in adopting schemes of gradual emancipation should have forced those

Southerners who fought for liberty between 1776 and 1783 to reconsider their position on slavery? How could liberty for republican Americans be compatible with the entrenchment of slavery in the American South? For a few slave owners, most notably Virginians, including most prominently George Washington, the only president to manumit significant numbers of enslaved people (albeit only after he died), the contradictions between fighting for liberty and holding slaves in bondage were sufficient to lead them to manumit slaves.⁶⁷

The main effect of the American Revolution on slavery, however, was to support its continuation and to allow its expansion into the Deep South. The Constitution was a resolutely proslavery document; the numbers of slaves manumitted outside the Chesapeake was pitifully small; and racially exclusionary policies towards blacks became ever more rigid and ever more easily enforced in the new republic. If the themes that the founders proclaimed to be the themes of the Revolution—the extension of universal and unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness throughout the world—were actually true, the inability of the founders to cut out the cancer of slavery from the new nation suggested that the American Revolution was a counter-revolutionary disappointment. Gary Nash makes a particularly strong argument along these lines. He notes that the American Revolution was an only limited inspiration internationally. Its only importance was as a colonial revolt by settler elites, not as an example of a campaign for liberty, as Americans imagined. The inability and unwillingness of most Southern founders to confront Carolinian slave owners over slavery was, Nash argues, a betrayal of revolutionary principles. Jefferson was the most prominent and disappointing example of cowardice, reduced to arguing that the fate of slaves had to be left to “the workings of an overruling Providence.” That this sort of equivocation over slavery was a rejection of the principles of 1776 was clear to the one true revolutionary, Thomas Paine, who lamented the retreat of Americans from “a *new system* of government in which the rights of *all* men should be preserved.”⁶⁸

Nevertheless, this is not necessarily how Southern whites saw matters. Their version of liberty was negative liberty, in the definition made famous by Isaiah Berlin, meaning freedom from interference by other people. They counterpoised that idea of liberty to an idea of slavery, which was based upon the idea of constraint. Key to both liberty and slavery was the idea of human agency: it was people themselves who determined whether they were to be free or to be slaves. This notion that humans, rather than providence or luck, determined status helps explain why slave owners used the discourse of slavery so often in explaining why they needed to resist British attempts to take away their liberty and thus make them “slaves.” It was a very short step from believing that human agency kept people free, to believing that those people who were enslaved were slaves because they were unprepared to resist. The relative paucity of slave rebellions in eighteenth-century British America was not just important for reasons of security. It was important ideologically. When slaves did not resist their condition, they implicitly accepted it, according to slave-owner opinion. Slave owners were sure that, if they were in the same position as their slaves, they would prefer to be killed rather than accept enslavement. Of course, such thinking elided the reality of slave lives and the near certainty that rebellious slaves would face a much worse fate when a rebellion failed than was ever likely to befall a planter protesting against British ministerial wickedness. But Southern willingness

to attribute agency to humans allowed them to blame their slaves for their predicament. The moral burden of slavery could be easily passed under such thinking from the slave holder—who had shown his virtue in the American Revolution by standing up to tyranny—to the slave—the abject acceptor of his or her fate and someone unwilling to die for freedom. Ironically, this meant that the only slaves whose humanity could be recognized were those rebels willing to be tortured to death rather than live as slaves. Slave rebellions in the Caribbean elicited a wave of sympathetic literature from slave owners about dying slaves who could be seen as “men” only when suffering and being killed.⁶⁹

Slave owners in the new republic found it easy to incorporate slavery within republican forms of government. Their understanding of liberty strengthened the institution’s ideological underpinnings by providing an argument for the protection of property.⁷⁰ Few slaveholders thought that slaves were anything other than property. Colonists had opposed Lord Mansfield’s rulings in the *Somerset* case of 1772, which they saw as an infringement of settler rights over property, by asserting that Africans did not belong to the realm of free-born Britons. Thus, they had no rights that needed to be recognized. African slaves, whom it was often argued were not made slaves in America, but had also been slaves in Africa, had “no natural right of their own country [to] Liberty.”⁷¹ Independence from Britain allowed those slaveholders who had become American to put this racially exclusive idea of liberty into practice. Slave owners joined the new republic in order to protect slavery: the general recognition of property rights in humans was the *sine qua non* of union. Their racist understanding of who was and who was not entitled to liberty allowed them to simultaneously expand white liberties while ensuring that the powers of the state would be used to raise formidable barriers to outside interference with slavery. Revolutionary ideology was thus easily exploited to support the continued racial exploitation of people of African descent in the new American South.⁷²

NOTES

- 1 Samuel Johnson was a conservative thinker who both believed that American republicanism was cant, and also that American slavery was morally reprehensible. For a good discussion of his views, see James G. Basker, “‘The Next Insurrection’: Johnson, Race, and Rebellion,” *The Age of Johnson*, 11 (2000), 43–9.
- 2 The literature on the causes of the revolution in the Chesapeake and the Lower South is, of course, vast. Few historians have addressed whether these regions might have stayed loyal. For representative works on the coming of the Revolution in the Chesapeake, see Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); John E. Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia, 1775–1783* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1988); Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* (Chapel Hill: University Press of North Carolina, 1982); Michael A. McDonnell, “A World Turned ‘Topsy-Turvy’: Robert Munford, *The Patriots*, and the Crisis of the Revolution in Virginia,” *WMQ*, 3d ser. 61 (2004), 235–70. For works on South Carolina and Georgia, see Robert O’Neil, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Low Country, 1740–1790* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Edward Cashin, *Governor Henry Ellis and the Transformation of British North America* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1994); Pauline Maier, “The Charleston Mob and the Evolution of Popular Politics in

- Revolutionary South Carolina, 1765–1784,” *Perspectives in American History* 4 (1970), 173–96; Jim Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King: Loyalists, Indians, and Slaves in the Revolutionary South, 1775–1782* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007).
- 3 T.R. Clayton, “Sophistry, Security, and Socio-Political Structures in the American Revolution; or, why Jamaica did not Rebel,” *Historical Journal*, 29 (1986), 319–44; Andrew O’Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).
 - 4 For an earlier examination of this question, see Trevor Burnard, “Freedom, Migration and the Negative Example of the American Revolution: The Changing Status of Unfree Labor in the Second British Empire and the New American Republic,” in Eliga H. Gould and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 295–314.
 - 5 For how slaves fared in the American Revolution and for accounts that stress the importance of slave agency in the Revolution, see Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 97–158; and Douglas R. Egerton, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
 - 6 The conflagration in St. Domingue that followed after French planters’ opportunistic use of the French Revolution to accelerate political change in St. Domingue seems at first glance to demonstrate the foolishness of planters starting revolutionary change in societies with large slave majorities. The planter revolt was quickly followed by agitation from petit blancs and free people of color for more self-determination, and then was followed from August 1791 by a massive slave revolt in the northern province of St. Domingue, which eventually led to the destruction of France’s richest plantation colony. But what happened in French St. Domingue can be distinguished from what happened fifteen years earlier in British America in three ways. First, the French planters did not initiate rebellion but responded to events that occurred in the metropolis. Second, the white position in St. Domingue was made perilous less by slave revolt than by its inability to reach an accommodation with St. Domingue’s large and powerful free colored class, the most important such group in the Americas, and a group that had no counterpart in any slave society in British America. Third, the pivotal event in turning colonial rebellion in St. Domingue into a revolution such as the world had never seen since ancient times was a fierce battle between white republicans, free colored royalists, and imperial sailors that resulted in the destruction of the city of Cap François on June 20, 1793 and in the death of thousands of people. The Haitian Revolution, we are beginning to realize, occurred for highly peculiar and contingent circumstances that make it hard to compare with other revolutions. For crucial works in English, see Jeremy D. Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); David Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002); John Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); and Malick Ghachem, *The Old Regime and the Haitian Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For works that place more stress upon the agency of slaves in the start of the Haitian Revolution, see Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) and Robin Blackburn, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights* (London: Verso, 2011).
 - 7 The key works here are Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992); and R. Don Higginbotham, “Some Reflections on the South in the American Revolution,” *Journal of Southern History* 3 (2007), 659–70. An important recent summary of the American Revolution as a settler revolt occasioned by constitutional concerns is Jack P. Greene, *The Constitutional Origins of the American Revolution* (New York: Cambridge, 2011).

- 8 Lyttleton's plan possibly echoed the famous "Join or Die" woodcut made by Benjamin Franklin and published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on May 9, 1754, responding to the Albany Congress of 1754, where Pennsylvania's Joseph Galloway proposed a plan of union uniting all the colonies of British North America into one body. Franklin depicted eight regions of British North America as a snake, cut into segments, making a point both about colonial disunity and also on how a unified set of colonies would be stronger than they were at present. Recycled in the lead up to the Revolution, the cartoon proved a powerful visual commentary on the need for organized action against British ministerial excesses. For Franklin and his desire for American unity, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 105–52.
- 9 British ministers tended to see New England as an exceptional region that could be differentiated from the rest of British America by its poverty, religious fanaticism, and martial spirit. These prejudices played a significant role in shaping the disastrous implementation of the Coercive Acts in Boston. Julie Flavell, "British Perceptions of New England and the Decision for a Coercive Colonial Policy, 1774–1775," in Flavell and Stephen Conway, *Britain and America Go to War: The Impact of War and warfare in Anglo-America, 1754–1815* (Gainesville: University Press Of Florida, 2004). For the Coercive Acts, see David Ammerman, *In the Common Cause: The American Responses to the Coercive Acts of 1774* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974).
- 10 Richard Walsh, ed., *The Writings of Christopher Gadsen, 1746–1805* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1966), 93; William Lyttleton's Speech to the House of Commons, October 26, 1775 in R.C. Simmons and P.D.G. Thomas, eds., *Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliaments Respecting North America, 1754–1783* (White Plains: New York: Kraus International, 1986), VI: 96.
- 11 For the views of an outraged South Carolinian in Britain, see, for example, Ralph Izard to "A friend in Bath," 27 October 1775 in Anne Izard Deas, ed., *Correspondence of Mr. Ralph Izard of South Carolina . . .* (New York: Charles S. Francis, 1844), I: 135.
- 12 Lyttleton's motion was lost 278 to 108. See Sylvia Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 67.
- 13 Michael A. McDonnell, *The Politics of War: Race, Class, and Conflict in Revolutionary Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 133–66; Cassandra Pybus, "Jefferson's Faulty Math: The Question of Slave Defection in the American Revolution," *WMQ*, 3d ser. 62 (2005), 243–64.
- 14 For Jeremiah, see J. William Harris, *The Hanging of Thomas Jeremiah: A Free Black Man's Encounter with Liberty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); William R. Ryan, *The World of Thomas Jeremiah: Charles Town on the Eve of the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- 15 Holton, *Forced Founders*; Robert Olwell, "Domestick Enemies": Slavery and Political Independence in South Carolina, May 1775–March 1776," *Journal of Southern History* 55 (1989), 21–48. A powerful counterargument that suggests that "excessive emphasis on the racial motive could lead to the erroneous notion that the southern parts of America would not have joined their northern neighbors had the southern peoples been as predominantly white as those in the middle or New England provinces" has been made in Higginbotham, "Some Reflections on the South in the American Revolution, 662.
- 16 For Lyttleton's career, see Jack P. Greene, "The Jamaica Privilege Controversy, 1764–1766: An Episode in the Process of Constitutional Definition in the Early Modern British Empire," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 22 (1994), 16–54.
- 17 For Tacky, see Edward Long, *History of Jamaica . . .*, 3 vols. (London, 1774; rept. London: Frank Cass, 1970), 447–64; and Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 125–39. For Jamaican concern over security, see O'Shaughnessy, *Empire Divided*, 43–57.

- 18 Trelawney to Board of Trade, 14 April 1750, C.O. 137/25/128. For white mortality in Jamaica, see Trevor Burnard, “‘The Countrie Continues Sicklie’: White Mortality in Jamaica, 1655–1780,” *Social History of Medicine*, 12 (1999), 45–72.
- 19 For the attribution to Trelawney, see Peter C. Hogg, *The African Slave Trade and its Suppression: A Classified and Annotated Bibliography of Books Pamphlets and Periodical Articles* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1973), 140. See also George Boulukos, *The Grateful Slave: The Emergence of Race in Eighteenth-Century British and American Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 75–81.
- 20 [Anon], *An Essay Concerning Slavery and the Danger Jamaica is Expos’d to from the Too Great Number of Slaves . . .* (London, 1746), 22, 37.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 Marjoleine Kars, *Blood on the River: The 1763 Slave Rebellion in Dutch Guyana* (forthcoming).
- 23 Basker, “‘The Next Insurrection,’” 39, 45, 47. Abbé Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, 6 vols., J.O. Justamond, trans. (London, 1788).
- 24 B.W. Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 141.
- 25 Philip Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill, 1998), xxii–xxiv.
- 26 Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 99.
- 27 Franklin Knight, “The Haitian Revolution: AHR Forum: Revolution in the Americas,” *AHR*, 105 (2000), 107; Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 3; Blackburn, *American Crucible*, 197.
- 28 Ada Ferrar, “Haiti, Free Soil, and Antislavery in the Revolutionary Atlantic,” *AHR*, 117 (2012), 40–66; Deborah Jensen, *Beyond the Slave Narrative: Politics, Sex, and Manuscripts in the Haitian Revolution* (Liverpool, 2011); Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York, 2012). But, as David Nicholls reminds us, we should not read too much into Haitian constitutional forms: all rule in Haiti has always been autocratic. Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1979), 57–60.
- 29 Jack P. Greene, “Liberty, Slavery and the Transformation of British Identity in the Eighteenth-Century West Indies,” *Slavery & Abolition* 21 (2000), 1–31; Olwell, “Domestick Enemies.”
- 30 James Sidbury, *Becoming African in America; Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 39–66.
- 31 Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: The Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 209–58.
- 32 Gary B. Nash, *The Forgotten Fifth: African Americans in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2006).
- 33 Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).
- 34 Daniel W. Howe, *What have God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- 35 For West Indian slave rebellions see Craton, *Testing the Chains*; Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736–1831* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992) and David Barry Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua with Implications for Colonial British America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985). The Stono revolt has inspired a considerable literature. The best account is Peter Charles Hoffer, *Cry Liberty: the Great Stono River Slave Rebellion of 1739* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

- 36 David Geggus, "The Enigma of Jamaica in the 1790s: New Light on the Causes of Slave Rebellions, *WMQ* 3d ser. 44 (1987), 274–99; Egerton, *Death or Liberty*; Mathew Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624–1783* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 111–40.
- 37 Long, *History of Jamaica*, 2: 452, 456; Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 172.
- 38 William Dickson, *Letters on Slavery* (London, 1789), 93, 107.
- 39 *The Humble Petition and Memorial of the Assembly of Jamaica to the King's Most Excellent Majesty in Council* (Philadelphia, 1774).
- 40 October 7–9, 1762, *Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica*, V: 352–3; Nicholas Bourke, *The Privileges of the Island of Jamaica Vindicated* (Kingston, 1765), cited in Jack P. Greene, "Liberty and Slavery: The Transfer of British Liberty to the West Indies, 1627–1865," in *idem*, *Exclusionary Empire: English Liberty Overseas, 1600–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 61–3.
- 41 Amanda Thornton, "Coerced Care: Thomas Thistlewood's Account of Medical Practice on Enslaved Populations in Colonial Jamaica, 1751–1786," *Slavery & Abolition* 32 (2011), 543, 550, 553, 557 (ft. 67).
- 42 Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British West Indies* 5 vols. (London: Stockdale, 1794) 2:169–70.
- 43 Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The first two centuries of Slavery in North America*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 115–6.
- 44 Christopher Tomlins, *Freedom Bound: Law, Labor, and Civic Identity in Colonizing English America, 1580–1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- 45 John Venn to Bishop Sherlock, 15 June 1751, Fulham Papers, VIII: 47. Lambeth Palace Library, London.
- 46 Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 129–56.
- 47 David Patrick Geggus, "The Caribbean in an Age of Revolution," in David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 84; B.W. Higman, "British West Indian Economic and Social Development," in Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman, *Cambridge Economic History: Colonial Period*, vol. 1 *The Colonial Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 326.
- 48 For the standard view, see Claudius Fergus, "'Dread of Insecurity': Abolitionism, Labor, and Security in Britain's West Indian Colonies, 1760–1823," *WMQ*, 3d ser. 66 (2009): 757–80.
- 49 Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 81–98.
- 50 J.R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- 51 Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, 94.
- 52 Isaac de Pinto, *Letters on the American Troubles*, trans. from the French (London, 1776), 35–46, 72, 83.
- 53 Emory G. Evans, *A "Topping People": The Rise and Decline of Virginia's Old Political Elite, 1680–1780* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 111–16.
- 54 George Metcalf, *Royal Government and Political Conflict in Jamaica, 1729–1783* (London: Longman, 1965), 167.
- 55 T.G. Burnard, "'Prodigious Riches': the wealth of Jamaica before the American Revolution," *Economic History Review*, LIV (2001), 506–24; B.W. Higman, *Plantation Jamaica 1750–1850: Capital and Control in a Colonial Economy* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2005), 1–6.

- 56 Julie Flavell, *When London was Capital of America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 21–23, 249–50; and Andrew O’Shaughnessy, “The West India Interest and the Crisis of American Independence,” in Roderick A. McDonald, ed., *West Indies Accounts: Essays on the History of the British Caribbean and the Atlantic Economy in Honour of Richard Sheridan* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1996), 126.
- 57 For South Carolina’s plantation system, see S. Max Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); and Joyce B. Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730–1815* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
- 58 Russell R. Menard, “Financing the Lowcountry Export Boom: Capital and Growth in Early South Carolina,” *WMQ*, 51 (1994), 659–76.
- 59 The backcountry tended towards Loyalism, making the relatively large number of whites in South Carolina on the eve of Revolution more a barrier to independence than a source of strength. In this way, ordinary whites in South Carolina were different than ordinary whites in Virginia, where support for independence was much more widespread among whites. Holton, *Forced Founders*. Historians tend to think that the British Southern strategy based on cultivating the support of Southern loyalists was a sound one. Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*; and Robert Stansbury Lambert, *Southern Loyalists in the American Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987).
- 60 McNeill, *Mosquito Empires*, 209–19.
- 61 In 1769, the South Carolina Assembly gave a large monetary gift to the radical British politician John Wilkes. It was an act of provocation following the Townshend Acts. By voting money to support a radical opponent of the Crown in Britain, the Assembly was showing its support for such actions in the colonies. It was also stating that it was not only New England that could engage in radical action. It led quickly to conflict with a governor and imperial government displeased with such provocation. Jack P. Greene, “Bridge to Revolution: The Wilkes Fund Controversy in South Carolina, 1769–75,” *Journal of Southern History* 29 (1963), 19–52.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 63 O’Shaughnessy, *Empire Divided*, 131.
- 64 Rebecca Starr, *A School for Politics: Commercial Lobbying and Political Culture in Early South Carolina* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 73–80, 148–58.
- 65 One fact which made South Carolina different from Jamaica was that, by the 1760s, South Carolina had started to have a naturally increasing slave population. It was no longer dependent on the Atlantic slave trade and thus had more freedom of action than did Jamaica, where the slave trade was vital to its economy. For the shift to a naturally increasing slave population in the American South, see Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 82–84. Nevertheless, even though South Carolina and Georgia were able to cope (just) without access to fresh slaves from Africa in the War for Independence, they remained as devoted to the institution as Jamaicans. The Revolution merely interrupted, rather than stopped, a veritable orgy of African slave-trading. See Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, eds., *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1983), 49–171.
- 66 Harris, *Hanging of Thomas Jeremiah*; Olwell, “Domestick Enemies;” Burnard, “Freedom, Migration and the Negative Example of the American Revolution.”
- 67 James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel’s Virginia, 1730–1810* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 68 Gary B. Nash, “Sparks from the Altar of ’76: International Repercussions and Reconsiderations of the American Revolution,” in Armitage and Subrahmanyam, *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context*, 1–19.

- 69 François Furstenberg, “Beyond Freedom and Slavery: Autonomy, Virtue and Resistance in Early American Political Discourse,” *Journal of American History*, 89 (2003), 1295–1330. For a West Indian example of sympathy for a tortured slave, see Bryan Edwards, “Stanzas, Occasioned by the Death of Alico, an African Slave, Condemned for Rebellion in Jamaica, 1760,” *Poems Written Chiefly in the West Indies* (Kingston, 1792), 38.
- 70 A sophisticated reconsideration of the meanings attached to liberty, and their relationship to slavery, is Michal Jan Rozbicki, *Culture and Liberty in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2011).
- 71 Samuel Estwick, *Considerations on the Negroe Cause Commonly So Called, Addressed to the Right Honourable Lord Mansfield* . . . 2d ed. (London, 1773), 82.
- 72 Peter Onuf, “Federalism, Democracy, and Liberty in the New American Nation,” in Greene, *Exclusionary Empire*, 153–59; Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); George Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders’ Union: Slavery, Politics, and the Constitution in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

CHAPTER FOUR

NATIVE NATIONS IN THE AGE OF REVOLUTION



Christina Snyder

In mid-April 1775, one month before British and colonial forces clashed at Lexington and Concord, a chief named Dragging Canoe sat alongside one thousand fellow Cherokees, headmen, warriors, and beloved women of his nation, listening to land speculator Richard Henderson and his assistant Daniel Boone make a pitch for much of present-day Kentucky and north-central Tennessee. Senior chiefs Oconostota, Attakullaculla, Old Tassel, and Hanging Maw, who had known a lifetime of mostly peaceful diplomacy with the British, seemed disposed to comply. Dragging Canoe, too, considered the proposal, but preferred to cede land north of the Kentucky River. In particular, Dragging Canoe refused to part with the Cumberland Valley, calling it “the bloody Ground” and promising Henderson it “would be dark and difficult to settle.”¹ This often-misquoted pronouncement had a double meaning. For Indian audiences of that time and place, “bloody ground” signified “hunting territory.” Throughout the eighteenth century, colonial expansion had shrunk and degraded Native hunting grounds. By 1775, the Cherokees, Creeks, and Chickasaws all claimed portions of the Cumberland, it being the closest and richest area for game.² Dragging Canoe also embedded a threat: “it was a bloody Country, and if [Henderson] went to it they would not hold him by the hand any longer, and must do it at his own Risque [sic], and must not blame them if any thing happened to him.” Henderson refused to consider Dragging Canoe’s proposal of a more northerly cession, “alleging the State of Virginia had already bought it, and . . . it was not that land he wanted.” Dragging Canoe angrily withdrew and returned to his village on the Hiwassee River, and the conference stopped for the day. The following morning, however, the Cherokee delegation acquiesced to Henderson’s proposed cession in exchange for £10,000 in trade goods. Although Britain deemed the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals illegal, undeterred settlers poured into the region, founding Nashville and other middle Tennessee settlements in short order.³

Like other inhabitants of the Atlantic world, Indians of eastern North America experienced the Revolutionary era as one of profound change. The tensions that surfaced during the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals illustrate some of the particular challenges that Indians confronted. Colonialism itself was nothing new: the older Cherokee chiefs who attended that conference had grown up in a world shaped by recurrent

waves of European invasion. Overcoming the devastation of disease, warfare, and the Indian slave trade, their forefathers had created a powerful nation that commanded the respect of imperial powers. But the land-hunger of Anglo-Americans that precipitated the American Revolution and unleashed a torrent of expansion thereafter introduced a new and more pernicious sort of colonialism. Much of eastern Indian country experienced the Revolutionary era not as a seven-year war, but rather as a decades-long contest for land, resources, and sovereignty. In Indian country, this was an era of destruction but also creation, for Native people articulated and enacted new visions for the future as revolutionary as those of their unruly colonial neighbors.

* * *

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Native communities in eastern North America experienced waves of epidemic disease that claimed up to ninety percent of the population. Certainly, disease had troubled pre-Columbian Americans: ticks carried Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever; bacteria infected people with pneumonia; those who lived in cities and towns even contracted crowd diseases like tuberculosis. Colonial newcomers, however, introduced deadlier epidemics of smallpox, influenza, yellow fever, and plague, and because Native Americans had never been exposed to such illnesses before, they lacked the immunity that most invaders acquired *in utero* or in childhood. Social, economic, and political factors also played a role in spreading these illnesses. Paul Kelton has argued that “the disease component of the Columbian Exchange was a mediated process in which the larger aspects of colonialism heightened Native vulnerability to infection and mortality.”⁴

Colonialism introduced new demands for warfare and slave raiding, which exacerbated epidemiological woes. A particularly potent vector of violence emerged out of the Northeast, where the Five Nations of Iroquois sought to protect their privileged access first to Dutch, and then to English, trade. To maintain their supply of beaver pelts, the Iroquois encroached on their neighbors’ territories, and the ensuing violence, which killed many warriors, accelerated Iroquois demands for captives to replace the dead. This voracious cycle of violence fueled by the need for furs and captives nearly destroyed tribes like the Huron, and pushed others, including the Eries and Shawnees, out of their homelands. By the mid-seventeenth century, Iroquois warriors might travel over a thousand miles, as far away as the lower Mississippi Valley, in search of captives among bow-and-arrow tribes.⁵ Displaced or victimized tribes became convinced of the need to secure their own European trade alliance—for firearms if nothing else. As one South Carolinian reported of his new trade partners: “Formerly when the Iroquois troubled these parts, they Drove the Chicasaws out of their Towns and made great Havock [sic] of them, but having attempted the like since they were furnished with Gunes [sic] found so warm a reception, that they thought fitt [sic] never to return since.”⁶ As was true for many other groups, the Chickasaw’s major trade commodity were Indian slaves. Practiced anciently in Native North America, captivity had long served important social, political, and even economic functions before the colonial era, but Europeans’ desire for labor and valuable exports created unprecedented demand. Scholars are only beginning to come to grips with the dimensions of the Indian slave trade, but historian Brett Rushforth has estimated that a

total of 2–4 million Indian slaves were traded by European colonists in the Americas from the late fifteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. In eastern North America, a terrible synergy of disease, warfare, and slavery consumed villages, towns, and even entire tribes.⁷

By the early eighteenth century, Native people had developed strategies to stabilize their societies. Epidemic disease continued to plague Native communities—eight major waves of smallpox struck between 1696 and 1783—but they did develop coping strategies that helped mitigate the effects. These included avoidance of colonial cities during sickly seasons, practicing quarantine at home, and the development of new spiritual protections including dances, songs, and prayers.⁸ Native nations also worked to curb violence. Between 1699 and 1704, the Five Nations negotiated a series of agreements with their British, French, and Indian neighbors. The Iroquois pledged to remain neutral in intra-imperial conflicts and to make peace with French-allied Indian nations against whom they had warred and slaved. In exchange, they received access to expansive hunting lands and trade networks from Detroit to Albany. These turn-of-the-century treaties enabled the Iroquois to preserve their political and economic power while bringing greater peace to much of eastern North America.⁹ In the South, the Yamasees revolted against British trade practices, starting a war that would bring down the Indian slave trade in that region. Since 1670, Native allies of the English had traded over twenty thousand Indian slaves to South Carolina. The colonists exported Indian slaves to New England or the Caribbean but retained a minority of them to serve the emerging plantation economy. By 1710, one in four Carolina households held Indian slaves. The Yamasees were among Carolina's chief partners in the trade, but they grew discontent after the colonists' extreme demand drove them to enslave captives the Yamasees had slated for adoption or even to kidnap family members. On Easter Sunday, 1715, the Yamasees inaugurated their namesake war when they murdered Carolina's Indian agent and then attacked colonial settlements. The Apalachees, Creeks, and Savannahs followed suit, killing resident traders and then joining the war against Carolina. By the time the final peace treaty was signed in 1718, South Carolina had lost about seven percent of its white population, and the rest of the colony had spent much of the war crowded into Charles Town's palisaded walls. After the Yamasee War, British colonists and Southern Indians developed more careful foreign policies regarding diplomacy and exchange, and refocused their economic relations on the deerskin trade.¹⁰

Native peoples also built political institutions capable of meeting the challenges of colonialism. Among the most powerful Native nations to emerge in the colonial era were the Creeks. In their homeland, population decline forced the collapse of the chiefdoms that had dominated much of that region since A.D. 1000. Survivors congregated in strong towns; some fled to the capitals of their former chiefdoms, while others sought refuge among trading partners or powerful neighbors. Beginning with those already allied with them through kinship or ceremony, political leaders pushed to make new connections, while a continued influx of refugees enhanced their population. Interior nations like the Creeks, at a greater distance from colonial settlements and more insulated from transatlantic networks that brought repeated waves of disease, were particularly attractive to coastal peoples. Of the Creek Nation, one Mohawk commented, "This nation seems always to have been the receptacle

for all distressed Tribes.” The population of the Creek homeland reached a low point of perhaps 9,000 in 1700, but through natural increase and immigration it doubled over the course of the eighteenth century. People came from across the deep South and as far away as the Ohio Valley to reside among the Creeks.¹¹ At the core of this emerging nation was Coweta, the first Creek town to establish trade relations with the English of Charles Town, and home to a powerful clan of political leaders. In addition to maintaining ties to South Carolina, Chief Brims also reached out to the Spanish at St. Augustine and the French at Mobile. On March 23, 1718, Creek chiefs from across the nation convened in Coweta and resolved to pursue Brims’s multilateral foreign policy. This resolution had the dual benefit of preserving Creek neutrality in the face of imperial conflicts, while forcing all three colonial powers to recognize Creek sovereignty.¹²

The Creeks were notable but not exceptional with regard to their diversity; many other nations were also multi-ethnic or even multi-lingual. In contrast to stereotypical depictions that cast Indian peoples as monolithic or internally homogeneous, Malinda Maynor Lowery argues that “geographic movement (rather than attachment to one specific place) and expansive attitudes about adoption and cultural exchange (resulting in racial mixing and cultural adaption) more accurately describe Indian groups historically.”¹³ Emerging nations used a variety of strategies to unite. The Cherokees drew on their kinship system, represented by seven totemic clans, to craft a national governing body with representatives from each clan.¹⁴ In the Northeast, the Five Nations of Iroquois, seeking an end to internecine warfare and political instability, came together in the fourteenth or fifteenth century to found the Great League of Peace. Initially a governing body composed of clan representatives from each nation who worked to preserve peace, the League of Peace, in the seventeenth century, gave birth to a broader political institution, the Iroquois Confederacy, which handled relations with imperial powers. A sixth nation, the Tuscaroras, joined the confederacy following the conclusion of a devastating war with North Carolina in 1713. As the Iroquois case demonstrates, successful colonial-era Native polities were dynamic and flexible.¹⁵

By the eighteenth century, Native peoples in the east maintained a variety of political forms based on their distinct cultures and histories, but both Indians and Europeans referred to these polities as “nations.” Nancy Shoemaker explains that “the word *nation* in early modern English was ambiguous, sometimes referring to a formal political entity and at other times to a vaguely defined body of people linked only by a common language and culture.” Due to its flexibility, *nation* is a particularly apt term to describe eighteenth-century indigenous polities. Despite their differing foundations and governing institutions, however, Indian nations maintained sharp understandings of their boundaries, both human and spatial.¹⁶

First and foremost, eighteenth-century Indian nations were communities of kin. At the core of these nations were lineage groups who recognized a kinship through either common descent or ceremony. In the Choctaw Nation, for example, formerly autonomous groups came together in the mid- to late seventeenth century. Survivors of the Moundville and Bottle Creek chiefdoms became members of the *Inholahtha* moiety, while those from the Nanih Waiya chiefdom and the Pearl River Valley joined the *Imoklasha* moiety. These moieties practiced exogamous marriage and performed prescribed, complimentary roles in important ceremonies, including burial of the

dead, so that former strangers became bound in an increasingly tight web of obligation. Because Indian nations developed ceremonies of incorporation, they could extend ties outward to new peoples, even to Africans and Europeans. The Cherokee chiefs present at Sycamore Shoals counted British Indian agent John Stuart among their kinsmen. Stuart, who married a Cherokee woman from the Long Hair Clan in the late 1750s, was adopted by his wife's people and dubbed *Oonodutu* or "Bushyhead" on account of his unruly blond hair. Their Cherokee descendants are still known as the Bushyhead family. In Indian country, kinship was inclusive, but also hierarchical: lineage members were internally ranked based on a number of factors, including age and gender; and descent groups were also ranked relative to one another. Membership in a kinship system was tantamount to national citizenship, and one's position within that system structured the substance of everyday life.¹⁷

Indian nations also maintained spatial boundaries. As Kathleen DuVal has argued, "seeing the Americas as places where whites gradually imposed borders can obscure the fact that Indians constructed and contested their own borders, geographic and metaphoric, long before Europeans arrived."¹⁸ Since ancient times, Native polities marked their bounds with scored trees, palisaded walls, and piled stone. The modern city of Baton Rouge, for example, derives its name from the painted red post that separated the Bayagoula and Houma territories. During the eighteenth century, Native people aggressively defended their national domains against outside assaults, whether by Indian nations or colonists. Trespass invited retribution, and cessions required negotiation and compensation. The treaty-making that dominated diplomatic relations between Native Americans and colonizers from the seventeenth through the late nineteenth century resulted not only from imperial demands for land but also the reality of indigenous sovereignty. Eighteenth-century Native polities, then, were born of indigenous epistemologies rooted in kinship, but they also responded to the demands of life in the colonial era and communicated their nationhood in a way intelligible to European empires.¹⁹

* * *

A year after the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals, Dragging Canoe invited a delegation of Northern Indians to the Cherokee Nation. This delegation, which represented the Cherokees' former enemies, the Iroquois, as well as the Ottawas, Delawares, and Shawnees, had traveled for seventy days. On their way from Pittsburg to the Cherokee Nation, instead of seeing a forest teeming with deer, bear, and buffalo, "they found the Country thickly inhabited." The rebellious Americans, "all in arms," had poured into Indian country, usurping the best farmland and hunting grounds. This recounting resonated with the Cherokee audience. According to one eyewitness, Dragging Canoe "said that they were almost surrounded by the White People, that they had but a small spot of ground left for them to stand upon and that it seemed to be the Intention of the White People to destroy them from being a people." Afterward, the Northern delegation traveled to the regional capital of Chota to meet with the Cherokee National Council. Among the Northern delegation's gifts were white belts of wampum, which symbolized the peace they hoped would reign among all Indians, as well as a powerful declaration of war against American encroachers—a purple-black and vermillion belt of wampum nine feet long. The bearer of the latter was a Shawnee

who proclaimed “that the red people who were once Masters of the whole Country hardly possessed ground enough to stand on; that the Lands where but lately they hunted close to their Nations were thickly inhabited and covered with Forts & armed men . . . that it was plain, there was an intention to extirpate them, and that he thought it better to die like men than to diminish away by inches.”²⁰

It is fitting that a Shawnee and a Delaware both served on the delegation, for those nations had engineered the nativist political and spiritual movement sweeping North America. Originally hailing from the Ohio Valley, the Shawnees fled their homeland in the late 1630s, pushed out by Iroquois seeking to expand their access to furs and captives. The Shawnees splintered, seeking refuge in other Native communities to the north and east. Delawares, meanwhile, were forced out of the Hudson and Delaware Valleys by the early growth of Pennsylvania. Particularly devastating was the disgraceful 1737 “Walking Purchase,” in which the heirs of William Penn produced a back-dated treaty that supposedly authorized the colony to purchase a tract of land west of the Delaware River as far as a man would walk in a day and a half. Provincial Secretary James Logan hired the colony’s three fastest men and cleared a trail. One of the runners made it nearly 70 miles, forcing the Delawares to cede most of southeastern Pennsylvania. Although Delaware leaders protested the treaty, most of their nation had to relocate to the Susquehanna Valley or the Ohio country. The Shawnee and Delaware nations had a great deal in common, chief of which was forced diaspora resulting from British colonialism. During their migrations, they crossed paths, intermarried, and sometimes dwelled in the same communities. While host nations usually regarded refugee groups as little-esteemed junior members or even resident aliens, Native groups throughout eastern North America recognized that Shawnees and Delawares were spiritually powerful. Cherokee oral tradition recalled how a Shawnee warrior had slain the Uktena—a monster of the Underworld, a winged snake with the head of a panther. In the seventeenth century, the Creek Nation welcomed a group of Shawnee refugees to live at Tuckabatchee and received from the visitors a collection of sacred copper plates, which the Creeks believed came from the Upper World. Native nations termed the Delawares “women,” in this context an honorific title referencing their role as peacekeepers, or called them “the grandfathers of all the other tribes.”²¹

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Shawnees and Delawares drew on their own diasporas, as well as the violence, dislocation, and loss they observed in other Native communities across eastern North America to formulate a powerful critique of colonialism. First articulated by prophets living in exile in the Susquehanna Valley, the message was popularized by the Delaware Neolin in the early 1760s. Historian Gregory Evans Dowd has termed it “the Indians’ Great Awakening”: “In its most important aspect, it was an ‘awakening’ to the idea that, despite all the boundaries defined by politics, language, kinship, and geography, Indians did indeed share much in the way of their pasts and their present. It was an awakening to the notion that Indians shared a conflict with Anglo-America, and that they, as Indians, could and must take hold of their destiny by regaining sacred power.” To achieve this, Indians had to reject goods of European manufacture, especially alcohol; give up the old strategy of imperial multilateralism and instead build up inter-tribal alliances; and downplay localized modes of self-understanding in favor of a new identity as Indians.²²

This movement inaugurated a critical period in race-thinking for American Indians. This is not to say that physical and behavior differences previously escaped them. Since the early colonial era, Indians remarked on the African and European newcomers' hair, footprints, posture, and mannerisms. According to a Natchez Indian, who explained that his people took turns when conversing, one distinguishing characteristic of the French was that "they speak all at once, like a flock of geese."²³ As early as the 1720s, skin color figured into the stories that Indians told about themselves and their neighbors. In 1730, a Cherokee conjurer called the English "the whitest [sic] people under the sun," telling a trader something along the lines of, "[T]he grate [sic] king of heaven has given yow [sic] the knowledge of all things [.] Shurely [sic] he has a grater [sic] love for yow [sic] then us and for us then The negrows [sic]."²⁴ While Indians began to read bodies for deeper meaning, they, like many European contemporaries, considered appearance an unreliable category of identity. After all, a person might transition from one group to another through adoption or intermarriage, and personal adornment, language, and even culture were demonstrably mutable. However, the crises unleashed by Anglo-American expansion encouraged Indians to develop their own language of race and to use it to restructure their own societies.

At the core of Neolin's nativist movement was a theory of polygenesis, which held that a Creator had made whites, blacks, and Indians separately, endowing each with distinct qualities. Many versions of this story circulated in eastern North America. One well-documented iteration comes from a Mikasuki chief named Neamathla, who told it to the governor of Florida in the early nineteenth century. According to Neamathla, the Creator crafted the original three humans from clay, first making a white man who was "pale and weak"—an object of pity. Second, the Creator "went into the opposite extreme, and when the second being rose up . . . he was *black!*" The Creator "like the black man less than the white, and he shoved him aside to make room for another trial." Finally, the Creator achieved perfection in the red man. Afterward, the Creator sent down three boxes of presents, one for each man. Feeling sorry for the weak white man, the Creator let him choose first; the white man came away with implements of learning and—tellingly—land surveying, including "pens, and ink, and paper, and compasses." The red man, the most masculine, "stepped boldly up and chose a box filled with tomahawks, knives, warclubs, traps, and such things as are useful in war hunting." The black man, least favored, was stuck with "axes and hoes . . . buckets to carry water in, and long whips for driving oxen." Neamathla and other nativists represented an Indian view of racial hierarchy, one in which the strong red people were the Creator's favorites, whites weak but lucky and clever, and unfortunate blacks made to labor. The conclusion of this story held that the Creator had placed white, red, and black on separate continents because the Creator never intended them to come into contact. By invading North America, whites and blacks had upset the balance of the cosmos and unleashed a maelstrom of devastation on red people. For Indians to right their world, they had to avoid the ways of the newcomers and push back the tide of colonialism.²⁵

In 1763, Ottawa war chief Pontiac demonstrated the power of nativism when he used Neolin's message to rally Native people from Pennsylvania to Michilimackinac against the British. Dissatisfied with British victory in the Seven Years' War, Indian

nations bemoaned the departure of the French, whom they regarded as superior diplomats and more generous allies. In response to British arrogance following the transfer of power, an Ojibwa named Minweweh proclaimed, “Although you have conquered the French, you have not yet conquered us. We are not your slaves.” Pontiac’s War began in the spring of 1763 when the multi-tribal community at Detroit laid siege to the local British fort. In a string of victories that stunned the British, Native forces took a total of eight major forts in the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley. Although the British slowly regained these forts, Pontiac’s War forced the British government to reconsider its Indian policy. Thereafter, officials returned to previous diplomatic protocols, which included participation in Native alliance-making ceremonies and more liberal gifting, and articulated a new policy, embodied in the Proclamation of 1763, to protect Indian lands against colonial squatters and land speculators.²⁶

Pontiac’s War demonstrated the political and military efficacy of nativism, but it was a radical ideology. To be sure, not everyone bought it. Traditionally, Indians saw their polities as communities of kin, collections of clans or moieties with clearly defined relationships and obligations. This circle might be extended through ceremonies of individual or group adoption, but even the largest Native nations remained manageable polities numbering in the low tens of thousands. Some politicians pointed to the ways in which nativism undermined tribal autonomy. When the Northern delegation visited the Cherokee Nation in 1776, prompting young men to paint their faces black and join the visitors in singing a war song, the old chiefs sat silently.²⁷ Later, nativist diplomats sent a war pipe to the Chickamaugas, but two senior chiefs intercepted and destroyed it. In response, Dragging Canoe’s nephew asked a pipe-maker to build a replica and told the people “to pay no more attention to the talks of the old Chiefs.”²⁸ In 1811, when Tecumseh visited the Choctaws, Pushmataha took a more confrontational stance, rebuking the Shawnee as an interloper and ordering a group of warriors to escort him out of the nation. Leaders of matrilineal clans also resented the ways in which young men—“giddy horse thieves” in the words of one Creek woman—meddled in matters of governance and war.²⁹

Native Americans of the east also encountered Anglo-American imperialism in uneven ways. Refugee Delaware villages and displaced Shawnee bands seem logical breeding grounds for nativism, but many nations had yet to experience the full force of settler colonialism. Interior nations knew the British primarily as trading partners and military allies. As Eric Hinderaker has argued, until 1775, imperial governments acted as a “restraining force” with regard to settlers.³⁰ Pontiac’s War demonstrated that Indian discontent could lead to costly wars and the interruption of global trade. Doubtlessly, the lessons of Pontiac’s War remained fresh in the mind of British Indian agent John Stuart when he negotiated a 1765 treaty with the Creek Nation for land in Pensacola: “We are extreemly [sic] Satisfied with the Land you have granted to us . . . and now as soon as the limits are Described we will set up Marks and if any white People settles beyond them we shall never enquire how they came to be Killed.”³¹

Following the breakdown of British authority in the early 1770s and the subsequent rise of an American revolutionary government that supported Indian dispossession, settlers poured into Indian country. As a delegation of chiefs explained to Spanish officials at St. Louis, “The Americans, a great deal more ambitious and

numerous than the English, put us out of our lands, forming therein great settlements, extending themselves like a plague of locusts.”³² In this context, many Indians began to extend their field of vision across the continent, articulating their identities not just as Cherokees or as members of the Wolf or Deer clan, but as red people. In a talk sent by Choctaw leaders to the Creeks, with whom they recently warred, the Choctaws implored, “Brothers! . . . The same father made us all red people and desired us to live in peace . . . [I]f we continue united they can never take [our lands] from us, but if we kill one another, who will be left to defend them?”³³ As Nancy Shoemaker has argued, it was almost certainly Indians, not whites, who began using the term “red people.” And it was not a phenotypical descriptor. Rather, Native people chose red because, in cosmological terms, it was white’s opposite and the color of war.³⁴

In mid-May of 1776, after Dragging Canoe and his warriors accepted the Northern delegation’s war wampum, they raised the standard of war at Chota and readied themselves for battle. That summer, they targeted those who had pushed beyond limits designed in the Treaty of Hard Labor Creek, and by August, few squatters remained in the Holston, Clinch, and Powell Valleys. In retaliation, the revolutionary governments of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina organized militia campaigns against the entire Cherokee Nation, not just the militants. Leading a combined force of about 3,600 men, generals Griffith Rutherford and Andrew Williamson marched against the Middle and Valley regions of the Cherokee Nation, taking dozens of captives, burning orchards and cornfields, and destroying thirty towns. Williamson’s home state of South Carolina offered £75 for each scalp. Colonel William Christian of Virginia completed the destruction by razing a number of important towns in the mountainous Overhill region. Thereafter, the Cherokee Nation endured severe hardships, including famine. Years later, when Christian returned to Dragging Canoe’s hometown of Great Island, he noted the lingering effects of his scorched earth campaign: “The miseries of those People, from what I see and hear seem to exceed Description; here are men, women and children almost naked—I see very little to cover either sex, but some old Bear skins, and we are told the Bulk of the Nation, are in the same naked situation.” The Cherokee council sued for peace in spring 1777. Those who remained militant, however, followed Dragging Canoe away from the main body of Cherokees to make new settlements, and they encouraged nativists from other nations to join them. Other Cherokees called them the *Tsi-ka-ma-gi* or “Chickamauga” after the region they settled; Dragging Canoe called his followers *Ani-Yun Wiya*—“The Real People.”³⁵

Most eastern Indian nations remained officially neutral during the American Revolution. Many nativist leaders regarded the war as a dispute between whites and urged Indians to stay out of the conflict. A minority of tribes, including the Stockbridge Indians, the Oneidas, the Tuscaroras, and the Catawbias joined the United States. Living closer to American settlements, most of these groups could not safely maintain their neutrality. By allying with the United States, they hoped that their white neighbors would protect their land rights. Unfortunately, they would be disappointed; Stockbridge warriors, who had volunteered as minutemen even before the war, returned a few years later to find Americans occupying their former homes. They reminded the Massachusetts government, “In this late War we have suffered much, our Blood has been spilled with yours and many of our Young Men have fallen by

the Side of your Warriors, almost all those Places where your Warriors have left their Bones, there our Bones are seen also.” An ally did step in to offer the Stockbridge Indians a place to resettle, but it was the Oneida Nation rather than the United States. Unlike the Stockbridges and Oneidas, most Indians who fought in the Revolution sided with the British. Indians distinguished the “English” from Americans, whom they called “Virginians” or “Long Knives,” and recognized that the latter, committed to expansion into Indian country, represented a greater threat.³⁶

News of American atrocities traveled down Native communication networks, pushing some formerly neutral groups toward militancy. In 1778, an American militiaman at Fort Pitt spotted an approaching Indian and, without asking questions, shot and killed the man. The murdered Indian, as it turned out, was a Delaware chief who, trying to preserve his people’s neutrality, had recently signed a peace treaty with the United States, and was merely delivering a message to the fort. The Delawares suffered another tragedy in 1782 at the mission of Gnaddenhutten, where a pacific group of Moravian converts gathered to harvest their crops. American militiamen encountered the Christian Indians, and accused them of spying for the British. Locked in their own mission church overnight, the Delawares prayed and sang hymns. The following morning the militia massacred 28 men, 29 women, and 39 children, and then burned their church. Two survivors managed to escape and tell others the horror of Gnaddenhutten. Historian Peter Silver has described how the “anti-Indian sublime,” a subgenre of American print culture that used tropes of violence to emphasize Indian savagery, united a diverse Euro-American audience during the Revolutionary era. Literate Indians like Alexander McGillivray turned these tropes around, pointing out the “savage mode” of warfare waged by whites against Indians, which included cutting fetuses out of women’s wombs and lewdly posing corpses with severed penises. At Chickamauga, strategically positioned at the nexus of eastern North America’s most important trail systems, ranks swelled with the spread of such appalling news.³⁷

Although conflict between settlers and Native nations pre-dated 1775, the violence of the Revolutionary era accelerated that polarization, crystallizing notions of racial difference for whites and Indians alike.³⁸ News of the murder of White Eyes or the massacre at Gnaddenhutten convinced many Indians that Americans, unlike their imperial predecessors, could not maintain alliance networks, for they would not tell friend from foe. In the words of one US Indian agent, “The Whites say they cannot distinguish between the Cherokees and Creeks, and I believe it would not be transgressing the bounds of Charity to say they do not wish to distinguish.”³⁹ Many Indians, drawing on the ideology of separate creations, held similar prejudices. A young Creek man killed a white, but otherwise inoffensive teenager named William Marshall because “his father had been killed by a white man and a white man he would have.” Sentenced to death by his Creek kin, the young man felt satisfied, saying, “his heart was straight and he was a man.”⁴⁰

The 1783 Treaty of Paris concluded warfare between the British Empire and the United States, but gave no peace to Indian country. Disregarding Indian land rights as well as the neutrality that most nations had maintained during the war, the treaty ceded all lands east of the Mississippi River, north of Florida, and south of Canada to the United States. Creek chief Alexander McGillivray fumed, “It is well known that His British Majesty has never possessed these lands neither by right of cession,

by sale, nor by conquest. On the contrary it is well known that, from the beginning of the settlement of the English colonies of Carolina and Georgia until the date of said treaty, never have they had title to, or pretended to own, these our lands, except those that were obtained by free gift or by sale for good considerations.”⁴¹ Most settlers, whose dream of independent land ownership had figured prominently in their desire to break from Britain, conveniently disagreed. The *Knoxville Gazette* reprinted an editorial from Pennsylvanian Hugh Henry Brackenridge who mocked “*the original right of these aboriginies [sic] to the soil*. It is a right of which I never thought with much respect. It is like the claim of the children; it is mine, for I first saw it; or what that of the Buffaloe [sic] might be, it is mine, for I first ran over it.” Echoing Emer de Vattel and John Locke, Brackenridge argued for the pre-emption rights of “civilized” nations over savage ones: “I consider the earth as given to man in common, and each should be restricted to that mode of using it which is most favorable to the support of the greatest numbers.”⁴² In 1783, the map of the newly created United States reflected aspiration rather than reality, and Indian nations vowed to retain the land they had never ceded.

Indians’ war for independence—their fight to create their sovereignty and homelands—lasted more than thirty years, from Pontiac’s War through the mid-1790s. If anything, American victory in the Revolutionary War exacerbated problems in Indian country. The United States aggressively sought to bring Indian land into the public domain, while creating a new vision of citizenship that afforded common white men unprecedented access to political, legal, and economic resources. However, the US had a weak national government and lacked a standing army, heightening the vulnerability of western settlers. Under these conditions, guerilla warfare raged in the disputed borderlands between Indian nations and the United States. One Georgia widow blamed the selfish actions of her neighbors for her husband’s death, explaining, “The doctrine in her neighbourhood was, let us kill the Indians, bring on a war, and we shall get land.”⁴³

The survival of one of the very few republics since ancient Rome was hardly a foregone conclusion, and chiefs like Alexander McGillivray reasoned that Indians could “Crush their hopes of possessing our Country.”⁴⁴ British and Spanish officials also eyed the American experiment with skepticism, and, from their posts at Detroit, Michilimackinac, and Pensacola, continued to supply their Indian allies with arms. In 1786, a council of Northern tribes, including Shawnees, Miamis, Potawatomis, Kickapoos, Wyandots, Iroquois, and Delawares, met at Detroit, where they authored a declaration to Congress refusing to acknowledge treaties they deemed fraudulent or to cede additional land. They also formed a confederacy, agreeing, “If we make a War with any Nation, let it result from the Great Council fire, if we make peace, let it also proceed from our unanimous Councils. . . . The Interests of any one Nation should be the Interests of us all.”⁴⁵ The following year, after meeting with representatives from the Northwestern Confederacy, Creek chief McGillivray reported, “we have agreed Jointly to attack the Americans in every place wherever they Shall pass over their own proper Limits, nor never to grant them Lands, nor Suffer Surveyors to roam about the Country.”⁴⁶ In both regions, Indians fought back incursions into their territories, and they cooperated in destroying settlements in Kentucky and the greater Ohio Valley.

Thrice the United States sent armies into the Ohio country. In 1790, the Northwest Confederacy’s forces, led by Miami chief Little Turtle and Shawnee Blue Jacket,

routed and scattered Josiah Harmar's army, and they dealt the United States an even more devastating blow the following year. Tracking the movement of General Arthur St. Clair's troops, the Northwest Confederacy's army, in the pre-dawn hours of November 4, 1791, quietly surrounded the invaders' encampment on the Wabash River. Achieving complete surprise, Confederacy warriors attacked just after dawn. Their victory, the greatest achieved by Indian forces over the US military, resulted in 647 deaths out of a total force of 1,400, plus hundreds wounded. The Confederacy lost just 150 men. The victors authored another missive to Congress, demanding that the US relinquish all claims to the Northwest Territory. Although US title to this territory looked less secure than ever, Congress responded with an offer of goods and cash for tribes willing to consider a cession. Some leaders of the Northwest Confederacy were willing to consider this, but ultimately the majority followed the position of the Shawnees, who favored the Ohio River as a hard-and-fast line between Indian country and the United States. Confederacy leaders offered a counter-proposal, recommending that Congress take the proffered money and give it to poor western settlers: "we are persuaded that they would most readily accept it, in lieu of the Lands you sold them. If you add also the great sums you must expend in raising and paying armies, with a view to force us to yield you our country you will certainly have more than sufficient for the purpose of repaying these settlers for all their labor and their improvements."⁴⁷

The victory over St. Clair represented the apex of militant nativism. As Gregory Evans Dowd has argued, "From the final years of the Revolution through the critical engagements of 1794, the Indians of the trans-Appalachian borderlands trained their guns with more consistency, more unity, and more consequence than did any other Indians in the history of the United States."⁴⁸ Thereafter, Native alliances fractured, and the United States gained a stronger foothold in the trans-Appalachian west.

In 1794, after the Northwest Confederacy rejected US demands for land, both sides again prepared for war. In the aftermath of St. Clair's defeat, the United States appointed General Anthony Wayne the commanding officer for the western army. Nicknamed "Mad Anthony" for his zeal for discipline, Wayne first used his army to build and reinforce forts before marching against Northwest Confederacy forces stationed at Fallen Timbers on the Maumee River. When Wayne's army attacked on August 20, 1794, some of the Confederacy warriors were at the nearby British post, Ft. Miamis, seeking provisions. Outnumbered, the warriors who remained attempted to stand their ground, but they ultimately broke, retreating to Ft. Miamis to seek aid from the British allies. When commanding officer Major William Campbell refused to open the stockade, Confederacy warriors realized the limits of British alliance. In the subsequent Treaty of Greenville, Confederacy leaders, already strained by tensions within their alliance, agreed to cede much of what is now Ohio and part of Indiana to the United States.⁴⁹

Southeastern nations also suffered in the mid-1790s. The two men who had most successfully combined nativist ideology with strong political leadership, Chickamauga Dragging Canoe and Creek Alexander McGillivray, died in 1792 and 1793, respectively. Dragging Canoe's nephew and successor, John Watts, or New Tassel, attempted to continue his uncle's legacy. The territorial government, however, concurred with a petition that argued, with regard to the Chickamaugas, "the laws of Nature & Society

enjoin their destruction.”⁵⁰ After several unsuccessful attempts, the Southwestern Territorial militia finally destroyed the major Chickamauga towns of Running Water and Nickajack in 1794, thanks to the guidance of a white man formerly held captive there. McGillivray’s successor, Efau Hadjo, also preserved some aspects of his predecessor’s foreign policy. He advocated for Indian unity, especially among the Southeastern nations, and engineered inter-tribal compacts prohibiting further land cessions, but Efau Hadjo also advocated for peace with the United States, saying, “if any Nation wishes us to go to War, We must not take their talk, but sit down in peace.”⁵¹ Withdrawing their military support for Indian allies, the Spanish signed the Treaty of San Lorenzo (called Pinckney’s Treaty in the US) in 1795. After three decades of war, Indian nations and Anglo-Americans shared an uneasy peace.

* * *

In the aftermath of 1795, as the United States sought to transform disparate former colonies into a nation-state, a similar project of nation-building took place in Indian country. Although the nativist movement and militant anti-colonialism declined, Native people continued to fight for their autonomy by other means. Many Indian politicians sought to reimagine their nations by advocating for political centralization, economic diversification, and expanded social services. As William McLoughlin has argued, “They had learned that their old ethic of harmony, cooperation, and slow popular consideration of issues to reach consensus was not effective in dealing with white officials and frontier politicians. They had to learn to deal with whites as adversaries, to confront white self-interest with their own self-interest, to combat power with power.” The Cherokees, in particular, developed a new model of indigenous nationhood. In 1797, the Cherokee state began to assume some of the duties formerly belonging to clans by forming a police force to deal with matters of justice. A series of laws passed in the early nineteenth century remade the Cherokee Nation from a community of kin into a constitutional republic, complete with an executive branch, court system, and bicameral legislature. Perhaps surprisingly, many Chickamauga warriors readily transformed into planters and champions of the new Cherokee economy. Decades of war against American settlements had infused their communities with capital, which Chickamaugas invested in new ventures, including ranching and cotton production. Among the more famous of these warriors-turned-businessmen was The Ridge, known as Major Ridge after his service in the Red Stick War. After the Chickamauga Wars, Ridge moved to Oochegeology, built a successful plantation and ferry, and served as speaker of the National Council. Major Ridge also supported education, and schools became the first social services offered by his nation. Later in the nineteenth century, the Cherokee state would expand its services to include poor relief, healthcare, and orphan asylums.⁵²

One scholar has described the Cherokee Nation as a “mirror” of the US republic, a label that captures some truths, but fails to account for influences rooted more deeply in indigenous cultures and more broadly in the Atlantic world.⁵³ Creek chief Alexander McGillivray described Indian sovereignty as “that inheritance which belonged to our ancestors and hath descended from them to us Since the beginning of time.”⁵⁴ Leaders like McGillivray asserted that nationhood was not an invention

borrowed from white neighbors, but rather something ancient and aboriginal. In his view, Indian nations were also dynamic, capable of taking on new meanings and roles. As did other people around the world, Indians drew on their own “cognitive maps and historical moralities” to craft new nationalisms in the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ Indians also engaged in critical conversations about culture, race, and sovereignty. Well-connected chiefs like McGillivray critiqued how the US used the Revolution as a kind of creation story to justify imperialism: in a letter to a Spanish official, he mocked, “Intoxicated with high Ideas of National Consequence from having unexpectedly gained the establishment of their Independency, they Vainly Imagined themselves what they affected to Stile [sic] themselves, Conquerors of the old & Masters of the New World.”⁵⁶ It is perhaps more surprising that even in small villages, Indians discussed global politics. In the early 1790s, a white captive who lived in a multiracial community in the Ohio country reported that Indians there talked about the French and Haitian Revolutions.⁵⁷ The increasing number of Indian children who attended western schools also found that historical perspectives also provided food for thought. In his essay “On History,” Choctaw Wash Trahern warned, “Lycurgus told the Spartans not to go to war too often with the same nation, lest they should learn their mode of warfare, and conquer them from their own lessons.”⁵⁸ What some historians have described as Indian nations’ assimilation or imitation of the US reflects their own narrow lens. As Trahern’s essay reveals, in seeking new tools of resistance, Indian nation-builders drew on a variety of models, including Western ones, but their aims were every bit as anti-colonial as those of their nativist predecessors.

* * *

In January of 1838, American missionary Cyrus Kingsbury watched as a group of Choctaws and Delawares interacted. By then, in accordance with the Indian Removal policy, both nations had been forced west of the Mississippi. The Choctaws resided in the southeastern corner of Indian Territory, where they had set about rebuilding their nation. Though they had initially suspected missionaries of colluding with the federal government to force their removal, the Choctaws accepted Kingsbury and others back into their nation to preach the gospel and educate their children. The Delawares Kingsbury observed that day were traders who, continuing their diaspora, ranged far out to the western Plains and south into Mexico. As he was wont to do, Kingsbury attempted to engage the Delawares in religious conversation, but they demurred, saying that Christianity did not much interest them. Referencing the Gnadenhutten massacre more than five decades earlier, the Delawares told Kingsbury that they “will never forget that.”⁵⁹

The Revolutionary era transformed Indian country, though it held different meanings and consequences for Native people than their white neighbors. Earlier in the eighteenth century, Indians in the east had managed to stabilize their nations after the long nightmare created by early colonial disease, slaving, and warfare. Through careful diplomacy, trade reform, and internal political re-organization, Indians developed ways to survive and sometimes thrive in a changed world. Most significantly, Native people built diverse and adaptable nations that remain their most valuable tools to retain autonomy in the face of imperialism. That carefully cultivated stability

came under widespread threat beginning in the 1760s. The Revolutionary ideology that empowered settlers to pursue individual land ownership resulted in an aggressive assault on Indians and their land that stretched far beyond the US War for Independence, resulting in over three decades of conflict. Meanwhile, the nativist movement that emerged out of the Delaware and Shawnee diasporas found a popular Indian audience during the Revolution era. The adherents of Neolin, Pontiac, and Dragging Canoe embraced the radical notion that Native people should look beyond their familial and national borders, to think continentally, to accept a new identity as Indians. But national borders were still useful. Even as chiefs like Efau Hadjo encouraged their people to expand their kinship horizons to include all “red people,” they also introduced nationalist reforms. On their own terms, Native peoples sought to join the world of nations. Referencing their parallel but distinct history, Chippewa chiefs told President Martin Van Buren: “you are the master of one nation, we are the masters of another.”⁶⁰ In Indian country, the Revolutionary era generated productive discourse with regard to racial unity and Indigneous nationalism, but the Delaware traders remind us that the memory of that violence and the ongoing costs of imperialism remain with us still.

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SECTION II

THE QUEST FOR
CONTINENTAL CONTROL



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CHAPTER FIVE

INDEPENDENCE FOR WHOM?

Expansion and Conflict in the South and Southwest



Kathleen DuVal

In April 1787, Yaholla Miko of the Lower Creek Town of Coweta gave Congressional Indian Superintendent James White a history lesson. Yaholla Miko explained that elderly Creeks could still remember allowing British colonists to build a town on the Savannah River in the 1730s. At that time, the British had agreed not to expand their new colony of Georgia beyond Savannah without Creek permission. After all, it was only by Creek consent that they were there at all. Yet now “the descendants of a people that have so recently settled on our lands, and have been protected by us,” had forgotten the terms of the Creeks’ gift. Rather than remaining grateful subordinates on Creek bounty, they were trying “to destroy a nation to which they and their Fathers are so much indebted.”¹

In 1787, Creek country encompassed some 100,000 square miles, from below Savannah in the southeast, to the southern loop of the Tennessee River in the northwest. If Creeks wanted to let foreigners have a town in one part of their country or hunting rights in another, that was their prerogative. It was also the Creeks’ right to use diplomacy or force to try to expel unauthorized immigrants from Creek lands. Although relatively large, Creek country was just one corner of the continent. North of the Creeks was Cherokee country and to the west were Choctaw and Chickasaw countries, as well as the less expansive lands of scores of smaller nations (including Biloxis, Chitimachas, Houmas, Pascagoulas, and Tunicas). Across the Mississippi were hundreds more peoples of various sizes and structures with their own claims to territory and sovereignty.

Across most of the continent, European empires layered imperial claims over actual Indian possession. Spain claimed the lands west of the southern states and everything west of the Mississippi. Within Spanish colonial towns, some remaining British and French subjects hoped for the return of their empires. Imperial officials understood the nature of their dominion. Beyond actual colonial towns and farms, imperial claims were designed mostly to impress other Europeans, not the various Indian polities that actually ruled the continent. Even empires had not claimed the entire continent since the first heady century of Spanish colonization, when its extent was still unknown to Europeans.

Different kinds of people had always divided North America. How could one polity rule the continent, with its millions of square miles, divided by countless rivers, lakes, and mountain ranges? Who would even want to try? At the end of the American Revolution, as at its beginning, most North Americans (whether in the United States, a colony, or an Indian country) presumed that multiple polities would continue sharing and contesting the continent as they always had. A couple of decades earlier, the Seven Years' War had dramatically changed colonial maps by expelling France, but it had changed little on the ground, as the same Indians continued to rule most places. West of the Mississippi, peoples such as the Osages and Comanches waged wars of expansion, displacing neighboring peoples. However, these were regional conflicts, extremely important locally but unlikely to expand across the Rockies or the Mississippi. Multiple sovereignties seemed likely to stay.

Despite all expectations, in the decades of the early republic, Americans completely overturned the presumption of multiple sovereignties. In shocking contrast to all remembered history, one nation forcibly subordinated most of its rivals and allies alike. Its people spread like a "plague of locusts" into other people's countries and made them their own.² Disregarding histories such as Yaholla Miko told, the people of the United States evicted entire peoples from their homelands, including the Creeks. By mid-century, their realm stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

In the northeast and the Ohio Valley, there were Indians whose experiences before and during the Seven Years' War acquainted them all too well with British-American ambitions and tactics, but the States' rapid rise and aggressive expansion came as a shock in the south. Through the early 1800s, Virginia and North Carolina barely extended to the Appalachians with only a few small and mostly short-lived settlements in what is now the western parts of those states, but what was Cherokee country at the time. To the south, South Carolina stopped at the foothills, and Georgia's claim merely hugged the southwestern side of the Savannah River. In reality, Georgia's only non-coastal town was Augusta, which was basically a Creek trading post with a few outlying plantations worked by the slaves of successful traders.

Congress's assertion that Indians east of the Mississippi River had lost the Revolutionary War, and that therefore the United States had earned their lands as "reasonable compensation for the expenses and alarms to which they have exposed their unoffending neighbors," seemed more an upstart's braggadocio than an enforceable claim.³ The British had given up on the rebelling colonies and had surrendered West and East Florida to Spain, but Spain's renewed interest in the region and pledges to support its new subjects and Indian allies suggested that European trade and military alliance were more likely to increase in the south than to decline. Congress could bluster and Georgians could try to steal Creek land, but Yaholla Miko and his Indian and colonial neighbors in the south believed that, if they could maintain and expand the region's alliances, the self-proclaimed "Americans" would develop a more realistic view of their limited power and position on the continent.

In retrospect, imagining that the United States would remain a coastal nation seems hopelessly behind the times. Indeed, "behind the times" is exactly how historical scholarship and popular memory have usually portrayed late eighteenth-century Spaniards and Indians. In this view, Spain was a crumbling empire unable to compete with Britain, Indians were living in ways incompatible with nineteenth-century agrarianism,

and slavery was set to become the antebellum system we know too well, unless the United States' founding fathers could decide to end their own hypocrisy. In this view, all were destined to be dominated by the young American republic. But in reality, Spaniards, Indians, and Africans in the Americas had changed their ambitions and methods with the times. Enlightenment-influenced Spaniards envisioned new forms of empire, increasingly viewing Indian alliances as the best means of maintaining and expanding the empire's borders.⁴ Indians, too, assumed they would determine their nations' futures. As the British lost the Revolution and American settlers threatened Indians' borders, many Indians began to identify alliance with Spain as their best hope of advancing their preferred future. And enslaved and free blacks took advantage of living in a borderland under conditions of near-constant war and rumors of war to carve out freedoms and opportunities unimaginable in the next century.

Examining the expectations and hopes of people south and west of the States just after the American Revolution reveals some alternative paths the region might have taken, rather than becoming the cotton frontier. Theoretically, the shared interests



Figure 5.1 While this 1783 map implies that most lands east of the Mississippi were “the United States of America,” a closer look at the labels on the map reveals a land divided into multiple polities, as the even larger region west of the Mississippi would as well, if it were labeled. John Russell, “An Accurate Map of the United States of America, according to the Treaty of Peace of 1763” (London, 1794). Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

of empires, Indians, and free and enslaved blacks could have made their goals compatible and perhaps attainable. Although none of these groups ended up dominating the nineteenth-century South, their attempts to do so help us to understand the contestations and ambitions of the post-revolutionary period and alternatives to the republic of speculators and settlers that did take over the continent.

“ALMOST WITHOUT GOVERNMENT”

The Treaty of Paris that Britain and its former colonies signed in 1783 gave the United States the lands from the Atlantic to the Mississippi and from the Great Lakes south to the thirty-first parallel (the current northern border of the state of Florida), but the other parties in the war rejected Britain’s right to cede much of those lands. Indians protested that, as a joint resolution by Creeks, Chickasaws, and Cherokees put it in 1785, it was “known to every person who is any ways conversant in, or acquainted with American affairs, that his Britannic Majesty was never possessed either by cession, purchase, or by right of conquest of our territories and which said treaty gives away.”⁵ For its part, Spain had won its battles against Britain along the Gulf Coast. At the end of the fighting, Spanish forces held the formerly British posts of Pensacola, Mobile, and Natchez, as well as both sides of the lower Mississippi. Spain’s imperial claims stretched from the Pacific to the Flint River in Georgia, from the Gulf to the Ohio River, and perhaps as far north as the Great Lakes. Spain rejected Britain’s right to give anything to the United States that Spanish forces had taken during the war.

To Indians and Europeans south and west of the United States in the 1780s, the new nation did not look like much of a threat. Despite the treaty, Britain refused to evacuate its northern forts. Spain’s King Carlos III, impatient with Americans’ repeated insistence that the thirty-first parallel was their southern border, closed the Mississippi River and the port of New Orleans to American and British traffic.⁶ Congress could do little diplomatically or militarily, and it proved as powerless to rule its own member states as to intimidate its neighbors. As Europeans learned to their amusement, the Articles of Confederation did not allow Congress to tax property or income or to levy duties on imports and exports. The Spanish Minister to the United States, Diego de Gardoqui, observing the country from its capital in November 1787, called it “almost without Government, without a Treasury, or means of obtaining money, and torn between hope and fear of whether or not their Confederation can be consolidated.”⁷

As the Spanish minister observed, Americans both hoped that the Constitution drafted in Philadelphia in 1787 would create a more stable government and feared that creating one sovereign nation out of thirteen divergent states would undermine republicanism. It was not clear that a strong national government in the east would be any better for western speculators and settlers than a distant empire had been. People in western settlements already found themselves with many of the problems of colonies, problems to which the Revolution had given a voice and a movement. Westerners felt insufficiently represented in faraway national and state legislative bodies that seemed to care little for their economic or physical well-being. In 1784, when residents of the self-declared “State of Franklin” debated whether to secede from North Carolina, one delegate pulled a copy of the Declaration of Independence

from his pocket and point by point accused the North Carolina state legislature of what Thomas Jefferson had charged to King George in 1776.⁸

While the British had lost the war, Spaniards and Indians seemed to have won it. In the final years of the war, Indians along the western borders of the States from New York to the Carolinas had united as never before. They had pushed back illegal settlement and set a precedent for coordinated action and successful operations.⁹ Spain's desire to expand with the help of sovereign Indian allies, and Britain's continued presence to the north and in the West Indies, meant continued military supplies to an effort that seemed likely to keep the States in check.

SIGNS OF TROUBLE

And yet there were signs that the American threat might prove to be unlike any that had come before. Southern Indians could look to the wartime experiences of Cherokees and Catawbas to see that the American threat was not to be taken lightly. After the Seven Years' War, Cherokees had begun to see more immigrants on their lands. In 1776, as war broke out between the British empire and its Atlantic colonies, young Cherokee men joined with Shawnees, Delawares, and Mohawks to attack frontier settlements. Virginians had turned their forces on the Cherokees and badly damaged them, burning their towns and forcing land cessions. The hundreds of Cherokee refugees who flooded into Creek towns with tales of fire and gore "damped the spirit of the Creeks," as British Indian Agent John Stuart put it.¹⁰ Other southern Indians would be more wary in the future.

Allying with the American rebels did not protect land either. In the first half of the eighteenth century, Catawbas had found themselves hemmed in by Carolinians. Rather than fight, Catawbas had allied with the colonists. The Catawbas fought alongside their neighbors against the French in the Seven Years' War and the British in the Revolution. Yet the Catawbas repeatedly found immigrants pushing onto their lands without permission, although they did use their reputation as Revolutionary heroes to improve relations with their Carolinian neighbors for a while.¹¹

After the war, more Indians as well as Spaniards in the south and west began to see American territorial aggression for themselves. In 1786, the Spanish governor of Louisiana complained to his superior in Mexico City about boatloads of Americans coming down the Ohio River to the Mississippi. Their boats were huge, he said, fitting up to 400 people. They were flat-bottomed with no keel or oars, designed only to float downriver. Because there was no way to go upriver (against the current) in one of these boats, once they got to Spanish Louisiana or Florida, "it is impossible to make them return."¹² How could a society have so many extra people? What was to be done about "unmeasured ambition of a new and vigorous people, hostile to all subjection, advancing and multiplying . . . with a prodigious rapidity"?¹³

PEACE IN THE SOUTH

In the 1780s, many Europeans and Indians grew worried enough about these aggressive expansionists to work actively to maintain the continent's multiple sovereignties. Working against long histories of divisions, diverse Indian nations and empires west of the United States saw a future together.

Some southern Indians had already begun making peace toward the end of the Seven Years' War. The Indian slave trade had brought extreme warfare to the south-east in the first half of the eighteenth century, drawing nearly all of its peoples into war.¹⁴ War, captivity, and disease had unleashed havoc on southern Indians. The peace movement gained advocates first within the Choctaws, Alabamas, and Cherokees during the Seven Years' War, as they saw another European conflict threaten to draw them into a war that had little to do with them. Chickasaws had long allied with the British against the Choctaws and other Indians allied with the French, but when the French lost the war and pulled out of the Mississippi Valley, the Chickasaws joined the peace movement. While it had been a minority movement within the nations in which it began, Chickasaw Headman Payamataha led his people into near-unanimity for peace. The participation of the Chickasaws—the most feared military force in the southeast—gave the movement the strength it needed. As historian Greg O'Brien has pointed out, the Choctaw-Chickasaw peace was one of the most successful diplomatic initiatives in history, turning them from decades of bloody war into a lasting peace.¹⁵ In the 1760s and 1770s, more peoples joined, including the Catawbass, the Quapaws west of the Mississippi, and some of the Illinois peoples in the north.

The southern peace movement required both a shared practical interest in ending war and a spiritual basis that is much harder for historians to uncover. Choctaws referred to Payamataha as “a witch” or “an oracle.” His influence came partly from the spiritual world, and his exhortation to make peace was based on a spiritual calling to create a different future.¹⁶ It was a message with wide appeal. Payamataha told a group of Choctaws in 1765 that if they “let what is past be buried in oblivion,” they could “look round, and see peace and plenty.” He encouraged them to “return to our village hand in hand rejoicing and carrying with us . . . presents.”¹⁷ Some vision, a lot of hard diplomatic work, and presents provided by Spain and Britain could bring peace and prosperity to the south. During the Revolutionary War, the peace movement combined with the early Cherokee defeat and British ambivalence toward arming Indians against British colonists to persuade most southern Indians to stay out of major fighting, even as northern Indians were uniting against the Americans. Southern Indians' decision changed the course of the war; Britain might have won if Indians had committed their full forces.¹⁸

While Payamataha's movement was one of peace with everyone, Native and non-Native, some Indians argued instead that the logical extension of the new peace was a “Southern Confederacy.” Together with the Northern Confederacy centered in the Ohio Valley, this proposed Southern Confederacy would fight against American aggression using Spanish and British arms.¹⁹ In one of many similar meetings, Chickamauga Cherokees (from Dragging Canoe's towns) and Creeks gathered in June 1787 to hear a call to war from a large deputation that included Shawnees, Mohawks, and Oneidas. In a message they carried to Chickasaws and Choctaws as well, the delegates took turns speaking of their desire “to renew and strengthen the chain of general union” with southern Indians. Their “causes of discontent” were the same, they said. American immigrants were moving onto their lands without permission. Alone, separate nations could not prevent the onslaught for long, but together they could join “for a general defense against all invaders of Indian rights.”²⁰

Creek Headman Alexander McGillivray was one of the strongest advocates of a Southern Confederacy. While the Creeks had not committed much effort to helping

the British during the Revolutionary War, soon after the war's end, the Creeks personally experienced Georgia's refusal to stay within agreed-upon boundaries and Congress's inability or unwillingness to keep its people in line. At the June 1787 visit of Northern Confederacy delegates, Creeks spoke of their "concurrence in every measure for restraining the Americans within proper bounds." They gave their assent for the Northern Confederacy to notify the Americans that they had resolved as a "General Confederacy" of North and South "to attack all attempting to extend their proper limits, and permit no surveyors to roam through the Western Countries."²¹ By then, McGillivray and other Creeks who wanted to fight the Georgians had persuaded most Creeks that was the right policy in the face of Georgian aggression.²²

The peace movement and the confederacies could be compatible. Both advocated Indian solidarity and Spanish alliance even if they differed on the use of violence against Americans. In July 1785, Creeks, Chickasaws, and Cherokees jointly resolved to the Spanish king to "in the most solemn manner protest against any title[,] claim[,] or demand the American Congress may set up for or against our lands, settlements, and hunting grounds." They reminded the king that they did not "forfeit our independence and natural rights" to anyone.²³

ALLIANCES

The Spanish wholeheartedly agreed to reject American claims. Usually historians portray the late eighteenth century as decreasing Indians' sources of European alliance and weapons, which was true in the north, but Spanish victories in the Revolutionary War brought hope to the Spanish and many Indians for a new and better alliance. With forces and colonists far too spread out to dominate by force, the Spanish crown envisioned expanding the empire with strong Indian alliances and reliable militias of both black and white subjects. Spanish administrators advertised their empire's ability to provide more security and opportunities to both Indians and colonists than the States, which like many bullies, were weaker and more isolated than they themselves realized. Guaranteeing both some local rule and economic opportunities within a colonial model would surely be North America's future. Although not as consistently, the British made similar offers, including sending supplies from both Canada and the Bahamas and recruiting Indians and slaves in the War of 1812.²⁴

At the end of the Revolutionary war, the Spanish crown called Louisiana Governor and General Bernardo de Gálvez to Spain to help formulate policies for the new provinces, and in 1785 it chose him to implement those policies as Viceroy for all of New Spain. As governor of Louisiana, Gálvez had learned the importance of Indian alliance in running a weak empire. Back in 1778, he had advised his superiors that with generous presents, the King could "keep them very contented for ten years with what he spends in one year in making war upon them."²⁵ Gálvez determined to apply the principles of Indian friendship to native peoples across New Spain's northern frontier.²⁶

The joint resolution of 1785 followed on individual treaties of the previous year, in which Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Alabamas had agreed to "an inviolable Peace and friendship with his Catholic Majesty" at congresses held in Pensacola and Mobile. The Spanish crown in turn substantially increased its budget for Indian presents, including guns, powder, and ball.²⁷ Spanish officials hoped that, as a later governor

of Louisiana put it, the Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks, Cherokees, and other Indians, being “fearful of the usurpations of the Americans,” would “be disposed to make the most destructive war on them whenever incited by presents and arms.”²⁸

Spain’s support for Indian land rights was essential to the alliances. Indian delegations repeatedly asked Spanish officials to “determine and agree with the American States on the boundaries of each [state], fixing them in a permanent manner, so as to prevent any cause of discord, and . . . put an end to the differences over this matter.”²⁹ The Spanish pointedly distinguished their position on Indian sovereignty from that of the United States. They referred to land that “belongs to the Chickasaw nation, although the Anglo-Americans consider it as belonging to them,” and to the Ohio Valley “under the domination of the United States of America” but “disputed by several Indian nations, who are in reality the rightful owners of it.”³⁰ Backing up their rhetoric, Spanish officials worked to keep their own colonists from settling in or hunting on Indian lands without Indian permission.³¹

INDEPENDENT STATES

The future of the south seemed to be taking shape: the United States in the east, Spanish colonial towns on the Gulf and along the Mississippi River, and independent Indian nations in the interior. Then some American citizens proposed an additional kind of polity, independent states allied with Spain, or perhaps quasi-colonies under Spanish dominion, but mostly local rule. Supporting American independence from Britain and local republican rule did not necessitate a belief that all Americans should forever be part of the United States. There could be more American republics on this vast continent if the US federal government did not suit all of their needs.³² Yet the need for trade and security meant that small settlements could not stand completely alone. Westerners needed both access to markets and protection from Indians who opposed American land claims.

In the 1780s, it was reasonable to believe that the Spanish empire could provide better economic connections and more secure land titles than Congress. Among those who proposed such plans to Spanish officials was the Congressional Indian Superintendent who met Yahallo Miko and the Lower Creeks in 1787: North Carolina Congressman James White. White owned large tracts of land along the Cumberland River near a town its founders were calling Nashborough or Nashville. The Cumberland settlement was untenable without protection from, or alliance with, Cherokees, Creeks, and Chickasaws, and it was useless without access to markets. White visited Spanish Minister Gardoqui in his New York home and assured him that, if Spain would offer him and his neighbors access to the Mississippi and the port of New Orleans, “His Catholic Majesty will acquire their eternal goodwill and they, as an Independent State, will draw closer to His Majesty.” Allied with Spain, the independent state of Cumberland would “serve as a barrier” to US expansion.³³ If Spain could help the western settlements obtain uncontested possession of the land and a market for their products, they might, as White put it, “preserve their independence from the American Republics.”³⁴

Knowing Indians claimed and controlled most of the land they wanted, these Americans not only requested Spanish diplomacy with Indians, they also approached Indians directly. In the spring of 1788, Nashville founder James Robertson and other

representatives traveled to Creek country to declare “that Cumberland and Kentucky were determined to free themselves from a dependence on Congress, as that body could not or would not protect their persons and property nor encourage their commerce.” They offered to be allies of the Creeks and subjects to the Spanish King.³⁵ Similar propositions of independency and alliance with Spain and Indians, or even subjugation to Spanish colonial rule, came from Revolutionary militia commander and future Tennessee Governor John Sevier, Virginia Congressman (representing the Kentucky counties) John Brown, Revolutionary Colonel and Congressional Indian Affairs Agent George Morgan, and Revolutionary General James Wilkinson.

CITIZENS INTO SUBJECTS

At the same time, Spanish officials invited immigrants from the States into Louisiana and the Floridas to become Spanish subjects. Spain could attract few colonists from Europe or New Spain to this far-off place, but they hoped to convert American families just as they were doing with formerly British subjects in the now-Spanish Floridas. Spanish officials hoped that the same disappointment with the United States that made Kentucky and other regions interested in leaving the union might make individual immigrants into good Spanish subjects. As Louisiana officials Esteban Miró and Antonio Valdés explained, surely “men who have lived under a precarious government, that did not give them any protection, surrounded by the peril of Indians, destitute of trade,” would be loyal to a government that in contrast “protects them, facilitates an outlet for their products, decides their controversies with justice without exacting any tribute or molesting them in their domestic operations.” As a benevolent and noninterventionist empire, Spain could win the affection of the immigrant generation, and their children and grandchildren “will know no other fatherland than this one.”³⁶

Spain offered immigrants a deal designed to make them grateful subjects. Any “good inhabitant” was welcome to a land grant big enough for a family farm, from about 200 acres for a small household, to nearly 700 for a large one. Every head of a family must “take the oath of allegiance to his most Catholic Majesty,” agreeing “to take up arms in defense of this province against whatsoever enemy who could attempt to invade it.” Once they swore allegiance, they would “enjoy the same franchises and privileges” as other subjects and “be governed by the same laws and customs.” They would have a free market at New Orleans for their produce, exempt from all duties and taxes. They would not be required to convert to Catholicism or financially support the church, although “no public worship shall be allowed but that of the Roman Catholic Church.” If interested, they would be welcome at the parish churches that the King would staff with English-speaking Irish priests.³⁷

Thousands of Americans accepted the offer to immigrate to Spanish Louisiana and West Florida. Some were speculators seeking to organize new settlements and sell off the land in smaller parcels or at least extract payments for transportation. Most were landless Americans hoping to find the family independence promised by the American Revolution by owning their own small farms, even if those farms ended up within the Spanish empire. Moving one’s family out of the US republic and into a foreign Catholic colony seems like a step backward from Revolution and away from independence, but these immigrants did not see it that way. They

sought land and access to markets as other Americans did, the building blocks of independence.³⁸

SLAVERY AND INDEPENDENCE

The thousands of enslaved and free blacks in Spanish colonial towns had their own ideas of independence. When the Floridas and Louisiana were a wartime borderland, many enslaved people forged freedoms and opportunities out of chaos and shortage. While many worked for freedom from literal enslavement, not all slaves defined that kind of independence as the most pressing—freedom from violent abuse, freedom to reunite with family members, or even independence of daily life within the legal strictures of enslavement might be more important. If Spain could offer them some measure of independence, security, and opportunity, they could be an important asset, either as troops within the colonies or more independent communities on Spain's borders.

During the war, enslaved and free blacks helped the Spanish to win and hold the British Gulf Coast posts. The size of Louisiana's free black militias doubled during the war, and the troops sent from Havana included many black soldiers. In the siege of Pensacola, General Bernardo de Gálvez's regular army and militia troops leaving from New Orleans alone included over 400 black soldiers.³⁹ Enslaved women and men performed the daily work of rebuilding, maintaining, and supplying the forts. They grew crops, processed timber, butchered the large quantity of meat needed for some 200 soldiers, and baked loaves of bread by the hundreds in the fort's ovens. Enslaved men worked on army roads, built carts and barrels to carry their supplies, and forged horseshoes and gun parts in the blacksmith shop. Some applied the knowledge and skills they had acquired running errands between plantations to become military couriers and spies. An enslaved man from Mobile called Petit Jean repeatedly spied on British and Chickasaw movements and served as Gálvez's courier.⁴⁰ While people of African descent also worked on the British side, the Spanish had a more formal tradition of black military service. And in contrast to the fight in the rebelling colonies, British officials were reluctant to force loyalist owners in the Floridas to part with their slaves, which might push those owners into rebellion themselves.

Some slaves used their increased importance to Spanish goals and access to officials to gain leverage over their masters and enforce oft-ignored Spanish law regarding the treatment of slaves. When the slaves of one master came to complain that he mistreated them and owed them money, General Gálvez ordered an inquiry into the matter and warned that the master must "understand that in these circumstances he must agree to deal gently with his slaves and pay them what is legitimately due."⁴¹ In May 1780, several slaves from New Orleans fled to Mobile, hiding in the bayous along the way. They presented themselves to the Mobile commandant, telling him that their masters had "punished them much" and that one master had even taken a shot at one of them. They asked to remain together at Mobile in Spanish service. The commandant wrote Gálvez to ask if they could stay, stressing the abuse and the fact that he had "very few blacks here for the many jobs for which they can be used."⁴² Wartime gave slaves some influence over officials desperate for their labor.

In the war years and the two decades following, an unprecedented 1,000 to 2,000 slaves in Spanish Louisiana and the Gulf Coast attained their freedom. Some were

directly freed for their service, while the vast majority bought themselves or were paid for by a family member or friend, some using payments that they had earned performing wartime work.⁴³ Petit Jean, the enslaved spy and courier, received his freedom for his services to Spain and paid for that of his wife.⁴⁴ While for enslaved people there were many kinds of independence to work for, large and small, the dramatic number of people who earned and saved to buy themselves and their loved ones when the opportunity arose shows that enslaved people saw personal freedom from enslavement as a precious kind of independence for themselves and perhaps a down payment on a hoped-for better life for their descendants.

At the same time, hundreds of men and women who could not afford their price took advantage of wartime disruptions to run away and live on the edges of plantations and in the bayous outside New Orleans. The Spanish called them “cimarrones,” meaning *wild* or *runaway* (shortened by the English to “maroons”). These refugee settlements had existed since the 1720s, but their numbers grew during the war. Cimarrones obtained supplies from plantations, either pillaging or relying on slaves to provide them, often in return for doing some of the slaves’ work in the woods such as gathering firewood.⁴⁵ Unfortunately we have no access to conversations within the cimarron communities, but it is possible that individuals’ desire for freedom ripened through discussion into wider beliefs in the viability of independent black communities and the injustice of slavery and the slave trade. At the same time, cimarron communities could actually protect a colony. In Jamaica, established cimarron communities at times fought for their colonizers and returned runaway slaves. Like free blacks who might credit the Spanish empire with giving them a fair chance, cimarrones could contribute to Spain’s imperial goals for North America.

INCOMPATIBILITY

Together, all of these people might have contained the United States, but their differing visions of what sovereignties could coexist, and of what their relationships to one another should be, ultimately doomed the effort. Despite Alexander McGillivray’s desire to make it so, southern Indians were not one people with a coherent foreign policy. While the Spanish short-term goal of preventing American expansion lined up perfectly with the goals of most Indians between the Mississippi and the Appalachians, contradictions in long-term goals destabilized Spanish–Indian alliances. And neither empires nor Indians would set a high priority on black independence.

Spain’s long-term goal was not alliance of equal sovereign nations but, instead, Spanish dominance and Indian dependence. Spanish officials longed for a large colonial population that might enable them to transcend the intricacies and expense of Indian politics. The Spanish commandant of St. Louis, for example, looked forward to the day when “these settlements, having been assured by a numerous population, may themselves lend to the Government aid and a strong hand to punish . . . any [Indians that] transgress order.”⁴⁶ Bernardo de Gálvez hoped that over time, Indians would “forget how to make war upon us” and forget how to make and use bows and arrows, and thus eventually be “unable to do without us.”⁴⁷ In that future, Indians would not demand presents and an alliance of equals but instead be Spanish subjects. Ideally, they would cease being Indians at all. As West Florida Governor Arturo O’Neill explained, Indians should become “loyal subjects of his Majesty,”

convert to Catholicism, enlist in the royal army rather than devising their own military strategies, intermarry with Europeans, and eventually be indistinguishable from other small-scale landowners in the empire.⁴⁸ Disappearance by assimilation was a recurring fantasy for colonial officials annoyed by the reality of Indians.

For their part, southern Indians could see that Spain's attempts to court Franklin, Kentucky, and Cumberland and attract American immigration did not exactly put a high priority on Indian land rights. McGillivray compared "filling up your country with those accursed republicans" to "placing a common thief as a guard on your door and giving him the key." Creeks believed the American rebellion proved these people's inherent disloyalty. They observed that surely "a set of men who so wantonly throw away their natural sovereign" could not "be serious in placing themselves under the Government of another."⁴⁹ The worst offense was the settlement the Spanish allowed on the Tombigbee River north of Mobile, on the borderland between the Choctaw and Creek country. Many of these immigrants were actually refugees from joint Northern and Southern Confederacy attacks on Cumberland. Fleeing south, these men and women had presented themselves in Spanish New Orleans and Mobile to ask for protection. Almost immediately after settling north of Mobile, they spread beyond the limits Spanish officials had set. Choctaw, Alabama, and Creek hunters repeatedly stumbled onto farms that had not been there the previous hunting season, and that had no permission to be on Indian hunting lands. The Spanish now were seeing first-hand what McGillivray called "the disposition to usurp that the Americans have if once they are allowed to establish themselves."⁵⁰

Similarly, Spanish efforts to appease former British and French subjects in the Floridas, and to invite American immigration, increased the importance of slavery in the region. If slaveholders and ambitious would-be slaveholders believed the Spanish threatened an expanding plantation economy, Spain's efforts to grow its colonial population would fail. During the war, as British posts of West Florida surrendered to Gálvez, he had pledged that the Spanish would not confiscate the slaves of formerly British subjects. After the war, the king exempted slave importations from import duties to encourage immigration and economic development. Even as slaves in Louisiana and West Florida were freeing themselves, ships brought in another 1,500 slaves.⁵¹

Louisiana and the Floridas might have continued the practice of tolerating runaway communities as in some parts of the Spanish and British empires, but local landowners insisted that the government crack down on cimarrones, as the responsibility of the empire to its law-abiding subjects. Louisiana Governor Esteban Miró decreed in 1784 that, until the cimarrones were destroyed, slaves would have to carry passes from their masters if traveling, and free blacks would need to show papers proving their status. Any who disobeyed would receive twenty-five lashes. Miró also reiterated existing regulations requiring masters' written permission to conduct trade or assemble and forbidding slaves from buying liquor, selling clothing, traveling by horse, and bearing arms (except for hunting or military service).⁵² Repeatedly, regular soldiers and white and black militia went into the bayous and captured hundreds of escaped slaves. The Spanish hanged the rumored leader of the cimarrones, Jean St. Malo, and three other men in the Plaza de Armas, New Orleans' main square, which the Americans would later rename for Andrew Jackson. Others were eventually either executed, branded, whipped, or sold to another colony.⁵³

Spanish officials saw no inconsistency in protecting and promoting the system of slavery while allowing individual emancipation and retaining an important class of free blacks. Indeed, people of African descent may not have seen a contradiction either. It was a model that had worked for centuries. When Gálvez assured white West Floridians that they could keep their slaves, he also pledged that “the conditions of the free negroes, mulatos and octoroons will be respected.”⁵⁴ Expanding the Spanish empire depended both on expanding slavery and having enslaved and free black militias in support of the colonies.⁵⁵ For now, American immigrants might accept both, but the idea of a free black state or tolerated cimarrones on their borders was too reminiscent of Spanish Florida’s older reputation as a haven for runaways.⁵⁶

Most southern Indians were also moving away from the era in which an all-black state or colony might seem like a good neighbor. In the Florida peninsula, Seminoles were reviving old traditions and allying with and even incorporating black communities, but most southern Indians were moving in the opposite direction. Cherokee, Creek, and Choctaw elite families began to own plantations worked by black slaves. Much like their white neighbors, many believed that a secure and prosperous future depended on plantation slavery.⁵⁷

At the same time, consolidating Indian foreign policy ran aground on the reality of Indian sovereignty. Believing that joint action would require centralized leadership, McGillivray had proposed that the Creeks be the Confederacy’s “head and principal,” and that he be its central coordinator.⁵⁸ Indeed, by 1788 he would call himself “head of a Numerous brave Nation, and of a Confederacy of the other Nations dreaded by and formidable to some who think much of their power.”⁵⁹ However, surrendering their sovereignty to McGillivray was not what most Indians had in mind. Choctaws and Chickasaws were glad to participate in Spanish diplomacy and let Creeks and Chickamauga Cherokees fight off immigrants from the east, but the tests of the Southern Confederacy came when their foreign policies diverged from those of the Spanish or the leaders of the Confederacy. One test was what to do about the American immigrants on the Tombigbee River above Mobile. In the name of the Confederacy, McGillivray sent the Spanish written protests, but because Spain had sanctioned the settlements, McGillivray implored members of the Confederacy not to use violence against them. At least some Choctaws rejected this prescription and determined to evict the immigrants violently. Choctaws attacked the Tombigbee settlements and recruited some Alabamas and Creeks to help.

For the Chickasaws, the trouble with the Southern Confederacy came when it threatened to draw them into war. While supporting the Confederacy’s Spanish diplomacy, the Chickasaws continued Payamataha’s strategy of peace with all. Therefore, when Virginia in 1783, and Congress beginning in 1785, invited the Chickasaws to negotiations, they accepted, seeking good relations, trade, and a negotiated end to illegal immigration. Choctaws, too, agreed to meet with representatives of the United States.⁶⁰ Creeks and Cherokees who considered Chickasaws and Choctaws members of a Southern Confederacy believed it was their right to use violence to dissuade independent treaty-making. Bands of Creeks and Cherokees tailed the Chickasaw and Choctaw delegations to and from negotiations with the United States at Hopewell Plantation in South Carolina in 1785, raiding them multiple times and taking horses and supplies, including the presents the Americans had just given them.⁶¹ Twice when Chickasaws granted Americans permission to build

a trading post, Creek bands dispersed the Americans as they were building. The second time, in 1787, the post was in the heart of Chickasaw country. A party of Creeks killed seven of the Americans and made a point of riding through Chickasaw towns displaying the scalps.⁶²

In the past, the decision to grant a bit of Chickasaw land for a trading post or anything else would have been an exclusively Chickasaw decision, much like Creek permission for Savannah in the 1730s. But advocates of a Southern Confederacy believed the Chickasaws had agreed not to cede any land. In this view, Chickasaw land was now Confederation land, at least *vis-à-vis* the Americans, and the whole point of the Confederation was keeping out Americans. McGillivray informed the Spanish that the Confederacy was “resolved to exterminate these friends of the Americans among the Chickasaws.”⁶³ Threats to assassinate Chickasaw leaders for exercising their own nation’s independent foreign policy were audacious but perhaps the logical conclusion of the Southern Confederacy. Finding that peace with their Indian neighbors required surrendering decisions of war and peace to outsiders, Chickasaws by the early 1790s found themselves fighting against the Creeks and even scouting for the US military in its fight against the Northern Confederacy.⁶⁴ Without a real Confederacy, and beginning to doubt Spanish reliability, in 1790 even the Creeks accepted Congress’s invitation to make a treaty.⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

The year 1795 marked the beginning of the end of efforts to prevent US expansion. The Northern Confederacy’s loss at the Battle of Fallen Timbers helped lead to the Treaty of Greenville, in which Shawnees, Delawares, and other Confederacy leaders ceded their peoples’ rights to present-day Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan. This American victory helped persuade the British to evacuate their posts in the Great Lakes. Seeing potential allies capitulate persuaded Spain to attempt to save its other possessions by accepting the thirty-first parallel as West Florida’s northern border and opening the Mississippi to United States commerce. Of course surrendering a little to save the rest did not work either, and the United States continued to push Spanish and Indian claims out of the way. To American settlers, Spain was an old and crusty monarchy, which, like Indians, was impeding the progress of a young, industrious people. At the same time, the incorporation of the Gulf South into the United States expanded plantations and limited opportunities available to slaves when they lived on a borderland. The self-emancipations of the 1780s and 1790s would come to a screeching halt as the United States and the cotton boom took over the Gulf South. The early American republic came to define citizenship as exclusively white and male, and those definitions would not die easily.

Under their new Constitution, Americans eventually proved able to consolidate people under the joint promises of independence, security, and opportunity. Rather than offering white westerners dependent colonial status, as Spain had, the United States chose a course more fitting for a republic. Beginning even before the Constitution was ratified, the original thirteen states grudgingly ceded their western claims to Congress, realizing they could not control their people moving west or protect them from Indians. New regions would have a path to becoming states with the same rights and representation as the original thirteen. Like white male easterners,

white male westerners would be citizens, not subjects. States would have local rule and national representation, decreasing the urge to break away. By ceding some sovereignty to the new government created by the Constitution, the states established a framework for dominating the nineteenth-century west.⁶⁶

Historians in recent decades have countered the traditional narrative that the American Revolution created a nation that expanded liberty, arguing instead that forging a republic for white men required defining women and non-white men as permanent non-citizens. For many people west of the Appalachians, becoming part of the United States decreased their independence and impinged on their national sovereignty. The United States eventually forced most of the region's native peoples west and spread their English-speaking, slave-holding republic to the Pacific and beyond. Empires, Indian nations, and the rival Mexican republic would all fail in the face of the United States and the "plague of locusts" it unleashed.

NOTES

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 - 16 Charles Stuart to Alexander Cameron, Dec. 16, 1779, fr. 343–4, v. 81, reel. 8, pt. 1, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
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CHAPTER SIX

INDEPENDENCE FOR WHOM?

Expansion and Conflict in the Northeast and Northwest

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Alyssa Mt. Pleasant

Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This familiar phrase from the Declaration of Independence served as the title for a traveling exhibit organized by the Yale University Art Gallery in 2008–2010. Featuring masterpieces of American art from the Yale collections, the exhibit included numerous works by John Trumbull. “The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776” and seven other paintings from Trumbull’s Revolutionary War series were placed prominently in the exhibit. Explaining the placement of the paintings and their significance, an entry in the exhibit catalog notes that Trumbull’s “vision of the Revolutionary war has been enshrined in our national imagination.”¹ Less well-known are his portrait miniatures, a series of studies Trumbull created in preparation for his celebratory paintings of the Revolutionary period. Between 1789 and 1794, while Trumbull lived and worked in Philadelphia, he was “collecting ‘heads’” of prominent figures.² These diminutive images, admired by art historians who praise the spontaneity and sensitivity of Trumbull’s work, were painted in oil on wood and framed in groupings of five.³ Visitors to the traveling exhibit could easily overlook these small portraits, which were placed unobtrusively in a far corner of the gallery.⁴ However, those who paused to examine the ten framed groupings may have been surprised by what they found. Amid images of Presidents and First Ladies, Senators and Supreme Court Justices, are the portraits of three Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) men: The Infant, The Young Sachem, and Good Peter.⁵ Their presence raises questions: Who were these men? What prompted Trumbull to ask them to sit for portraits? Why would Indians figure prominently in studies for a series of paintings intended to chronicle the history of the Revolution? These questions prompt us to think more broadly about the early history of the United States.

Trumbull’s paintings provide a window into the world of the “American Revolutionary Republic.” His iconic images of the Revolution convey the aspirations and values of the United States while memorializing the violence of war.⁶ The miniature portraits of Indians provide a subtle signal regarding the continuing uncertainty Americans faced in the wake of the Revolution. While political leaders worked to craft a constitution and develop a federal system of government, they also managed an on-going war. Trumbull’s miniatures were painted during a period of tremendous tension and violence between American Indians and citizens of the emerging

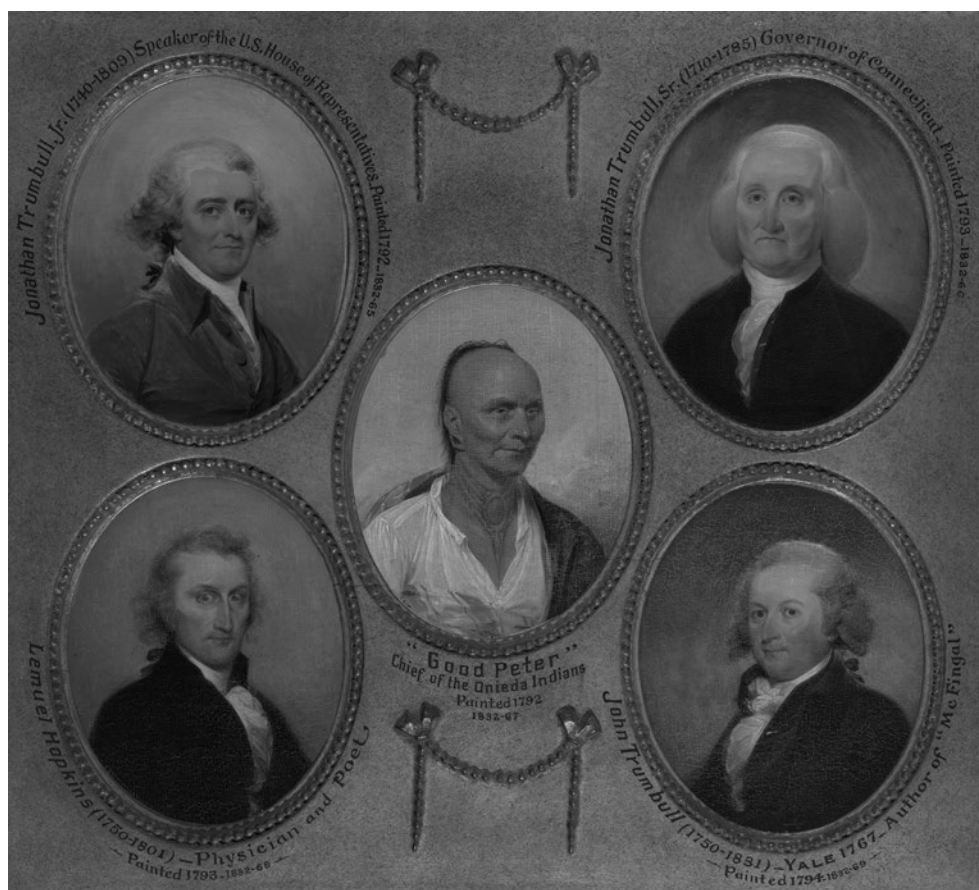


Figure 6.1 Jonathan Trumbull Jr., oil on wood miniatures, 1792.
Trumbull Collection, Yale University Art Gallery.

nation-state. Following the Treaty of Paris, the United States orchestrated peace conferences where American treaty commissioners imposed coercive terms on tribal nations who sent representatives to negotiate at Fort Stanwix, Fort McIntosh, Fort Finney, and other sites.⁷ Indian leaders, recognizing that the Americans' presumption of conquest was entirely unwarranted, mounted a vigorous defense of their territory and sovereignty. In their efforts to influence the pace, extent, and terms of the United States' geographic expansion, Indian people confronted officially sanctioned state violence as well as vigilantism by backcountry squatters. They pursued a variety of strategies that included large-scale confrontations with US forces, raiding and retaliation in backcountry settlements, diplomatic negotiations, individual and small group actions, mobilization of indigenous political philosophies in support of coordinated actions, as well as spiritually motivated or defined resistance movements.⁸ As scholars of American Indian history have observed, pragmatic, nativist, and accommodationist outlooks informed actions taken by individuals, families, clans, tribal nations, and confederacies throughout the post-Revolutionary War period. Local and regional

circumstances shaped these strategies, yielding varying results and consequences. This chapter compares post-war strategies employed by Haudenosaunee people with those of Indians in the Ohio Country, with a particular emphasis on imperatives to negotiate peace or cultivate violent resistance.

In 1786, a council near the mouth of the Detroit River drew together Cherokee, Chippewa, Delaware, Haudenosaunee, Huron, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Shawnee, Miami, and Wabash confederacy peoples to consider their available recourses in the wake of the Treaty of Paris and subsequent imposed treaties. Deeply concerned about invasions of their territory and questionable protocols surrounding peace treaties and land cessions, the council determined that future negotiations should be conducted in public councils and that unanimous consent would be required. Explaining their position in a late 1786 speech directed to the United States government, the United Indian Nations (as the unified group called itself) argued that this approach would eliminate “mischief and confusion” in US–Indian relations. The correspondence also shared the expectation that the United States should order surveyors to cease and desist marking out lands north of the Ohio River. Underlining the seriousness of their endeavor, the United Indian Nations indicated that if the United States failed to meet their conditions, the group would not be held responsible for the consequences. Furthermore, they noted that if violations of their territory continued, they would “be obliged to defend those rights and privileges” to the land that had been passed down to them by their ancestors.⁹

This declaration articulated a principle of just war that was mirrored by the United States Congress several months later. Prior to responding to the United Indian Nations’ request for a treaty council, Congress passed the Northwest Ordinance in July 1787, establishing a mechanism to incorporate the contested region into the United States and creating the possibility that Congress could authorize “just and lawful wars” against American Indian nations who opposed these efforts. While the language of the ordinance declared “the utmost good faith” would guide negotiations with American Indians, Congress’ decision to authorize the sale of millions of acres in this contested region undermined the sincerity of that assertion.¹⁰ After an abortive attempt at treaty negotiations along the Muskingum River failed in December 1787, “mischief and confusion” continued. Another treaty followed at Fort Harmar in early 1789, however, land sales and expanding settlements dictated the United States’ position at that council, prompting the Americans to resort to the same coercive tactics employed during the treaties “negotiated” in 1784 and 1785. Difficult negotiations at Fort Harmar exposed fissures within the United Indian Nations, but the United States’ insistence on the narrative of Indian defeat and dispossession at the proceedings also reinforced angry sentiments. As historian Richard White has argued, far from subduing Indian resistance to American expansion, the events at Fort Harmar launched the second phase of the confederacy.¹¹

By late 1791, American Indian resistance efforts in the Ohio Country produced significant successes. In November of that year the Miami war chief and political leader Little Turtle (Mishikinakwa) and the Shawnee leader Blue Jacket (Waweyapiersenwa) played leading roles in the humiliating defeat of American forces led by Arthur St. Clair.¹² During an engagement near the Miami settlements at Kekionga (the seat of the Miami confederacy located near modern-day Fort Wayne, Indiana), an intertribal force, including Miamis, Shawnees, Delawares, Potawatomis,

and people from other nations in the region, killed over six hundred soldiers or militia members and wounded several hundred; casualties accounted for more than half of St. Clair's troops.¹³ This resounding defeat came just over a year after Josiah Harmar, commander of American forces in the Northwest Territory, suffered humiliating losses in the region. During these years, the United States was devoting extraordinary resources to the conflict in the Ohio Country. In 1791, nearly 2,700 troops were stationed in the region, representing eighty percent of American forces.¹⁴ As news of St. Clair's defeat reverberated throughout the American population, the federal government weighed next steps. Henry Knox, the Secretary of War, advocated for an expanded military force, requesting 5,000 troops and associated annual expenditures exceeding \$1 million.¹⁵ Ultimately, leaders in Philadelphia decided to support continued military engagement *and* diplomacy. In doing so they extended a policy that had been in place since 1789, when Secretary Knox argued that negotiating and compensating Indians for land cessions would be less costly than military campaigns.¹⁶

Thinking back to the portraits that John Trumbull painted of the Infant, the Young Sachem, and Good Peter, it is clear that the size of these miniature paintings belies the significance of the subjects. American Indian affairs was vital business for the citizens of the nascent republic, just as war and diplomacy with the emerging nation-state was critical to the future of tribal nations. In late 1791, shortly after St. Clair's defeat, Haudenosaunee people gathered at Buffalo Creek to consider an invitation to visit the American seat of government. A trip to Philadelphia presented another opportunity to secure their homeland, preserve their sovereignty, and restore their nation-to-nation relationship with the United States. At the same time, it posed a challenge because any rapprochement with the United States threatened to weaken relationships with American Indian nations further west. Haudenosaunee people weighed their options and ultimately authorized a delegation to travel to Philadelphia.

The negotiations that took place in Philadelphia in Spring 1792 were part of a diplomatic tradition that stretched back hundreds of years. Since the late seventeenth century, when England displaced the Dutch colonial government along the northeastern seaboard and New Netherland was renamed New York, Haudenosaunee people negotiated with English colonists and officials who aspired to establish a settler colony in the region.¹⁷ The protocols that guided these negotiations were informed by indigenous political practices that pre-dated the arrival of Europeans. Gayaneshagowa, the Great Law of Peace that provides the socio-political structure for Haudenosaunee nations, also offers guidance for international relations. The prophetic teachings that the Peacemaker (Dekanawida) shared with five warring nations created mechanisms to end internecine warfare and bring the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca nations together in a confederacy. It provided a structure of governance that respects the independence of each nation while facilitating coordinated action on matters of shared interest. Additionally, Gayaneshagowa established protocols for welcoming visitors and incorporating new nations that embraced the tenets of the Great Law of Peace. These principles and practices were in place for generations prior to European arrival, and they allowed the five nations to develop expansive, prosperous communities across today's state of New York.¹⁸

When Haudenosaunee people engaged early European explorers and colonists, they were operating from a powerful social, political, and economic base. They met the vanguard of Dutch factors and engaged French explorers and missionaries during the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Haudenosaunee people introduced principles embedded in Gayaneshagowa to their European counterparts, and in 1645 Jesuit missionaries at Three Rivers created the first written documentation of critical protocols of this system of governance and international relations.¹⁹ Eventually recognizing that the European visitors had no desire to be incorporated into the Haudenosaunee socio-political system, diplomats developed an alternative relationship that is referred to as *Guswenta*. As Haudenosaunee traditionalists explain, *Guswenta* conveys the understanding that peace and friendship can be maintained in a colonial context when both parties embrace policies of noninterference in the other's government, religion, or way of life.²⁰ These principles guided diplomatic relations throughout the colonial period and, in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, Haudenosaunee people drew on this philosophy of mutual respect as they interacted with Americans.

Timothy Pickering, who served as a federal commissioner to the Haudenosaunee during the early 1790s, facilitated the 1792 meeting in Philadelphia. Initially appointed to meet with the Senecas in fall 1790, Pickering conducted several meetings with Haudenosaunee people during the years that followed. His first meeting at Tioga Point (near today's Athens, Pennsylvania) took place in November 1790. At that time Pickering received his initiation into the protocols of Haudenosaunee diplomacy. The Seneca leader Farmer's Brother (Honayewas), as well as the orator Red Jacket (Sagoyewatha) and others, instructed the American regarding the ritual of condolence, one of the foundational elements of the Great Law of Peace.²¹ Following the teachings of the Peacemaker, Haudenosaunee people acknowledge death (due to natural events or violence) through a ritual intended to ease the grief of those who have lost kin, community members, or leaders. In its most elaborate form, performance of this ritual could take a full day. It is integral to social, political, and spiritual life within the six nations.²² Building on their understanding that easing the grief of the bereaved creates space for productive interactions, Haudenosaunee people incorporated this ritual as an essential step preceding diplomatic negotiations.²³

The circumstances that precipitated Pickering's initial council centered on bereavement. In 1790, Seneca people were particularly concerned about the murder of two men who had been hunting or trading near Pine Creek in Pennsylvania. After learning of the deaths in July of that year, they contacted Pennsylvania authorities to request a council where the condolence ritual would be performed and diplomatic relations renewed. Since the federal government, through the Trade and Intercourse Act, had recently asserted its supremacy in Indian affairs, it fell to the newly appointed Indian commissioner to organize a council that would smooth over difficulties between the Senecas and Pennsylvania. As part of his charge, Pickering was also responsible for introducing the principles of the new federal legislation to Haudenosaunee people.²⁴

As Pickering learned when he received a positive response to his invitation to council, in addition to the two murders in Pennsylvania, nine murders were committed against Senecas since the most recent peace accord at Fort Harmar in 1789. According to the Senecas, this violence and other affronts threatened peaceful relations.

They noted that the metaphorical chain of friendship connecting the Americans and the Haudenosaunee nations was “very rusty.” Their young warriors were restless and the Senecas expressed hope that a council incorporating appropriate condolence rituals would renew peaceful relations.²⁵ Incidents of backcountry violence against Indians were all too frequent during the colonial era, and, in the period following the Revolution, indiscriminant Indian-hating continued unabated.²⁶ To the west, in the Ohio Country, this violence contributed to escalating conflict. For the Senecas, whose territory between Lake Erie and the western Finger Lakes region in today’s New York State was not yet subject to the same level of intensive colonial expansion, violent incidents on their borderlands and within their territory were infrequent but troubling. In 1790, they were genuinely distressed that one of their leading men, an individual who was expected to assume a leadership position the following year, was killed by vigilantes. Additionally, recognizing that the on-going conflict in the Ohio Country placed significant pressure on the emerging American republic, the Senecas likely imagined that raising the spectre of angry young warriors would strengthen their position in diplomatic negotiations. By offering the means to diminish this threat through performance of the condolence ritual, they primed the federal commissioner to conform to Haudenosaunee diplomatic protocols.

The preliminary correspondence between the Senecas and American officials had the desired effect. Motivated to minimize the veiled threat of retaliatory violence, the Americans were willing to devote significant resources to their effort to address the concerns of the Senecas who participated in the council at Tioga Point. Pickering, in his capacity as federal commissioner, consulted with more experienced negotiators and learned that he should expect a substantial delegation of Indians. He was encouraged to provide generous hospitality, in addition to the goods that would be distributed as part of the condolence ritual. Accordingly, the commissioner anticipated hosting approximately 200 people and providing provisions for nearly two weeks at a cost of £150.²⁷ These details reveal that Pickering was an eager student and they also suggest that the novice diplomat had a lot to learn about Haudenosaunee diplomacy. Sensitive to his lack of familiarity with foreign practices and protocols, Pickering expressed humility in his opening remarks when the council began in mid-November. Both Red Jacket and Farmer’s Brother seized on this opportunity to educate the American, and Pickering’s account of the council incorporates significant detail regarding the protocols of Haudenosaunee diplomacy.²⁸

One of the problems that Haudenosaunee people, and American Indians more generally, faced following the Revolutionary War was the profound absence of cultural literacy among United States officials. Other colonial regimes, particularly the French and the English, developed sophisticated understandings of appropriate diplomatic protocols and practices that they honed over generations of interaction with indigenous peoples and tribal nations.²⁹ In contrast, United States officials largely lacked diplomatic experience with Indians and, as mentioned above, initially approached these relationships with hubris inspired by claims of conquest. By the time Pickering traveled to Tioga Point, the Americans were shifting their approach, and Haudenosaunee people found a receptive audience for their instructions in proper diplomatic protocols.

In his initial remarks to Pickering, Red Jacket agreed to provide instruction in practices that had been passed down through the generations of Haudenosaunee

people. As the orator gestured toward the process of “clearing a path” between Indians and colonists, he introduced a component of the condolence ritual that was also central to diplomatic proceedings. Before productive conversation could take place at Tioga Point, the American hosts were obligated to acknowledge difficulties that may have been encountered on the journey and to clear the ears, eyes, and throats of their guests. On this particular occasion, Red Jacket responded to Pickering’s opening remarks by acknowledging that the people had heard the greeting, but “our eyes are not yet washed that we may see, nor our throats cleared that we may speak.”³⁰ Upon hearing this, Pickering made appropriate gestures to ease their difficulty before the council paused for several days. When they reconvened, Red Jacket continued instructing the American in the finer points of this diplomatic process, explaining that once difficult issues had been resolved they should be buried symbolically. In this particular case, he advised Pickering that in addition to providing condolence for the recent murders, Pennsylvanians should be admonished to allow Indians to travel “unmolested.” Once this was accomplished, Red Jacket signaled that completion of this ritualized process enabled larger diplomatic discussion to commence.³¹

The proceedings at Tioga Point continued until November 24. Over several days of discussion, Pickering familiarized the assembled group with the Constitution and the terms of the Trade and Intercourse Act. During this time he received further instruction in the nuances of Haudenosaunee diplomacy, including the significant role wampum played in reinforcing agreements and the importance of oral recall.³² He also learned from Farmer’s Brother and Red Jacket that the assembled delegation was deeply concerned regarding unscrupulous land transactions that had recently taken place.³³ They asked Pickering to appeal to the president on their behalf, explaining that the best way to brighten the chain of friendship was by reinforcing the territorial integrity of Haudenosaunee nations.³⁴ When the council finally drew to a close, Red Jacket and others expressed optimism that the 1790 meeting at Tioga Point was the beginning of renewed diplomatic relations and shared their belief that future progress hinged on adherence to proper diplomatic protocols and a respectful separation between Haudenosaunee people and the United States.³⁵

The council at Tioga Point laid the groundwork for several years of productive diplomatic negotiations. As Red Jacket noted in his closing remarks to Pickering in November 1790, the business of negotiating peace was ambitious; he observed that efforts to resolve the extraordinary conflict between tribal nations and the United States would take place “upon a large scale.”³⁶ In terms of geographic scale, the number of participants, and the varied interests in play, US–Indian relations in north-east and Ohio Country were incredibly complex at this time. This complexity is quickly revealed through a snapshot of Haudenosaunee–US relations in 1790. As scores of Seneca people gathered at Tioga Point to negotiate with Timothy Pickering, a smaller delegation led by Cornplanter (Kayenthwahkeh), the Chief Warrior of the Senecas, traveled to Philadelphia to raise similar concerns at the seat of the United States government. A few months earlier, members of the Onondaga and Cayuga nations, accompanied by the Mohawk leader Joseph Brant (Thayendanegea), met with New York State officials at Fort Schuyler and revisited the terms of recent land cessions.³⁷ Further east, the Oneida nation, whose territory lay close to established American settlements, suffered from what historian Karim Tiro has characterized as

“a plague of Yankees:” as demonstrated by the federal census, land speculators and settlers were moving into the area in significant numbers by 1790 and encroaching on their land.³⁸

When Red Jacket spoke of the “large scale” of this undertaking, he also understood that events in the Ohio Country held extraordinary significance. Haudenosaunee people, most prominently Joseph Brant, had been involved with resistance efforts in that region since the mid-1780s. Brant, who was born in Ohio Country and lived there as a small child, was instrumental in formulating the 1786 statement issued by the United Indian Nations. As scholar Lisa Brooks explains, this statement embraced indigenous conceptions of the region surrounding the Ohio River as a “dish with one spoon,” a geographic, social, and political configuration where the land was held in common and the political configuration privileged “equality and building consensus among all of the nations that ate from the dish.”³⁹ Brant understood that his “sentiments respecting the lands [in the Ohio Country were] not new”: an agreement to conceptualize this region as a “dish with one spoon” was consecrated with wampum perhaps a century earlier.⁴⁰

Historians appreciate the region’s fluidity during the centuries following initial colonial encounters; Shawnees, Delawares, Mingos, Wyandots, Piankashaws and many others determined strategies for coexistence as tribal communities coalesced and dispersed, and colonial traders, missionaries, and explorers moved through the region. In the mid-eighteenth century, the Ohio Country was disrupted by the French and British contest for empire, and in the decades that followed, violence reshaped the region.⁴¹ Michael McConnell has argued that the Seven Years War prompted an orderly transition in the region as Indians developed a defensive strategy of resettlement, moving away from contested areas and delineating more clearly defined territories.⁴² Increasing colonial pressures also contributed to a nativist revival, a violent uprising targeting British forts in the Ohio Country and Great Lakes, drawing the contest over expansion and the western boundary of colonial settlement into sharp relief during the 1760s.⁴³ During and after the Revolutionary War, Indians in the Ohio Country continued to establish inter-tribal villages where Algonquian people with overlapping social, political, and spiritual practices “formed the heart of the resistance” to American expansion efforts.⁴⁴ At places like Kekionga, where the presence of British traders and some Indian agents ran counter to official policy, these informal relationships “tended to weave Indian and British interests together more tightly” as the struggle for the Ohio Country escalated.⁴⁵ In the 1780s and 1790s, Indians found tentative support among the British as they mounted vigorous defenses against small- and large-scale incursions that violated the boundary at the Ohio River.⁴⁶

Americans signaled their intense interest in the Ohio Country in a number of ways. Land speculators invested in the region, individuals and families staked claims by building homesteads (often squatting), and the national government created mechanisms for managing development through legislation such as the Northwest Ordinance while also supporting military and diplomatic missions. From 1786 to 1788, increasing numbers of Americans migrated west past Fort Harmar, the outpost positioned at the confluence of the Ohio and Muskingum Rivers. In seven months during late 1786 and early 1787, 177 boats carrying 2,689 people passed the fort. That number increased to 308 boats in the six months that followed, and in the

first half of 1788 over 6,000 people trekked west.⁴⁷ The growing presence of Americans, whom Richard White has described as “restless, aggressive, and eager for land,” contributed to accelerating cycles of violence and retaliation in the region.⁴⁸

In 1790, Josiah Harmar led American forces in a short-lived campaign against Indians in the Ohio Country at the same time that Timothy Pickering was preparing for negotiations with the Senecas at Tioga Point. During the months that followed Harmar’s defeat, Secretary of War Henry Knox proposed another military expedition into the region and also devised a diplomatic strategy that involved the Haudenosaunee. Building on conversations that took place during Cornplanter’s visit to Philadelphia in late 1790, American officials hoped the Seneca leader would act as an intermediary with Indians in the Ohio Country. Knox commissioned Colonel Thomas Proctor for a diplomatic mission to contact Cornplanter and continue west to conduct negotiations with the Miami and Wabash Indians. Proctor’s instructions directed him to proceed expeditiously in the hope that he would reach the Ohio Country well in advance of an anticipated military expedition into the region.⁴⁹ According to the detailed report Proctor submitted, his trip did not go as planned.⁵⁰ Cornplanter and other Haudenosaunee people were unconcerned about the American diplomat’s timetable for this mission; they insisted that he conform to their schedules and protocols, and in doing so created significant delays. Statements made in meetings with Proctor, as well as prior and subsequent interactions with Indian delegations from the Ohio Country, make clear that Haudenosaunee people were reticent about becoming involved in the conflict in any capacity. Instead, they used these diplomatic interactions to articulate their goal of achieving a meaningful peace that reinforced their sovereignty and the integrity of their territory.

In contrast to indigenous people in the Ohio Country, Haudenosaunee people were eager to protect their nations from further violence. No less staunch in their commitment to resisting the advance of settler colonialism, they sought to resolve their conflict with the United States through diplomatic negotiations. Although the threat of violence could be used strategically (as in the diplomatic overtures discussed above), and Haudenosaunee people were well aware that their reputation for effective armed campaigns circulated widely within the American public, they made concerted efforts to avoid becoming ensnared in the conflict to the west. Two important factors influenced this approach: on a practical level, Haudenosaunee people were still rebuilding their communities following the unprecedented invasion of their territory in 1779, and on a philosophical level the imperatives of the Great Law of Peace propelled them to maintain peace within their nations.

Haudenosaunee diplomats rarely missed an opportunity to remind Americans of the scorched-earth campaign that devastated their territory in 1779. On numerous occasions, they addressed the President as “Town Destroyer” (Hanodagonyes), a title bestowed upon Washington when he was a young officer in the Seven Years War.⁵¹ The Revolutionary War campaign that destroyed forty villages and hamlets reinforced the significance of this title.⁵² Cornplanter, during his meetings in Philadelphia in late 1790, reminded Washington

when your army entered the country of the Six Nations, we called you the town destroyer; and to this day, when that name is heard, our women look behind them and turn pale, and our children cling close to the necks of their mothers.

Our councilors and warriors are men, and cannot be afraid; but their hearts are grieved with the fears of our women and children, and desire it may be buried so deep as to be heard no more.⁵³

Eleven years after an American general named John Sullivan led over four thousand Continental Army soldiers and militia members into their heartland, memories of the invasion remained fresh in people's minds. In addition to burning their villages and hamlets, the Americans pillaged vast agricultural fields and stores, and destroyed orchards during the harvest season. Describing the campaign as "warfare against vegetables," historian Barbara Graymont estimated that soldiers destroyed at least 160,000 bushels of corn in addition to untold quantities of other vegetables.⁵⁴ Although few people were killed during the invasion, it created a substantial refugee population as thousands fled in advance of the Americans.

The Revolutionary War was a transformative event for colonists and Indians alike. Haudenosaunee people, who described the conflict as a "whirlwind," experienced tremendous upheaval during and after the Revolutionary War. Their political structure faced important challenges as key leaders passed away in the early years of the war, the nations held divergent positions regarding alliances with the British and the upstart United States, and their homefront was ravaged. Despite these extraordinary challenges, Haudenosaunee people quickly set about rebuilding their communities following the invasion and they worked to reinforce their system of governance. Many refugees settled at Buffalo Creek in the immediate aftermath of the invasion, where they formed a multi-national community near the eastern terminus of Lake Erie that soon became the new Haudenosaunee political center. By the time the war came to a close in 1783, Buffalo Creek was a cosmopolitan community where members of three of the six Haudenosaunee nations (Seneca, Onondaga, and Cayuga) made their home. It was the site of councils regarding internal affairs, where the people worked to reconstitute their damaged confederacy. Additionally, Buffalo Creek was a place where traders, diplomats, and other visitors from Indian nations and colonial governments were welcomed.

As conflict accelerated in the Ohio Country, a variety of visitors made their way to Buffalo Creek. Haudenosaunee people offered cordial hospitality but were non-committal. This approach held for both Native and non-Native delegations that appealed for their support. In September 1789, a party of Shawnees and Cherokees requested support for their actions against American encroachment, appealing to pledges of unified resistance made at earlier meetings in the Ohio Country. Joseph Brant and Farmer's Brother both offered responses that supported the good judgment of Indian nations to the west but politely declined to become involved. Brant's comment noted that Haudenosaunee people were invested in maintaining their own confederacy, a message that Farmer's Brother reinforced. The Seneca leader also emphasized, in response to the suggestion that they had become cozy with the Americans, that there was no special arrangement.⁵⁵ Similarly, when Thomas Proctor arrived in Seneca territory in early 1791 hoping to secure Cornplanter's participation in a diplomatic mission to the Ohio Country, his requests were deflected. Although Cornplanter had indicated during earlier meetings with Americans in Philadelphia that he was willing to travel west to engage Indians in the Ohio Country, when indiscriminant vigilantism among backcountry settlers threatened his community, he

reconsidered this offer.⁵⁶ Instead Cornplanter directed the American diplomat to Buffalo Creek, where Haudenosaunee people meeting in open council proved resistant to the proposal.⁵⁷ Following weeks of intermittent discussion, and repeated refusals of assistance, the matrons in the community offered a solution to the impasse. Speaking on behalf of the senior women, Red Jacket explained that although Proctor's proposal was "very troublesome"—the American carried an aggressive message emphasizing violent retribution—they were willing to send a delegation provided they travel by boat. This condition soon proved to be the undoing of Proctor's mission, as the British denied passage on Lake Erie.⁵⁸ Again Haudenosaunee people maintained their distance from the conflict in the Ohio Country.

Young King (Guiengwahtoh), another prominent Seneca man, spoke of the imperative for peace when he addressed Thomas Proctor at the conclusion of the American's extended stay at Buffalo Creek. Gesturing toward earlier American requests that they remain neutral, as well as similar advice from the British, he declared "we are desirous ourselves of remaining peaceable." Young King insisted that Haudenosaunee people were "neither on the one side, or on the other."⁵⁹ In fact his remarks clearly indicated that Haudenosaunee people would pursue their own agenda, sending Joseph Brant as an emissary to the tribal nations in the Ohio Country. Young King promised that they would work to negotiate a peace if that seemed possible, and in the meantime announced that the people would soon depart to meet Timothy Pickering. Peace, the Seneca leader emphasized, was the theme of the upcoming meeting with the federal commissioner.

Jasper Parrish, a former captive fluent in the Seneca language who served as an interpreter on numerous occasions, circulated Timothy Pickering's invitation to Haudenosaunee people during late spring 1791.⁶⁰ The federal commissioner proposed a meeting along the Tioga River in mid-June. When the council eventually convened in early July, over one thousand people gathered at Newtown Point.⁶¹ Pickering was charged with securing Haudenosaunee neutrality in the on-going conflict in the Ohio Country and with introducing instruction in plow agriculture, literacy, and numeracy. Haudenosaunee people had their own agenda for the council: they consistently reiterated their interest in achieving a meaningful peace that reinforced their independence and protected their landbase. In their interactions with Pickering, they continued to insist on appropriate use of Haudenosaunee diplomatic protocols and chastised the American when he made blustering comments about the strength of American forces. Upon hearing the request that Haudenosaunee warriors assist the Americans, Red Jacket admonished Pickering that his "discourse is intermixed with friendship and trouble" that was inappropriate in the context of a peace council.⁶² By the time the council concluded, Pickering, who was chastened in his efforts to project American power, returned to Philadelphia with assurances of Haudenosaunee neutrality and the promise that diplomatic engagement would continue. For their part, Haudenosaunee people returned to home with reassurances regarding their land base and the knowledge that Americans were finally invested in brightening the "chain of friendship."

To the west in the Ohio Country, Joseph Brant's diplomatic mission yielded limited results. Following meetings at the Maumee Rapids, he was charged with the task of appealing to British leadership in Quebec for additional support of the resistance movement. Although this ran counter to Brant's charge to pursue peace,

it also allowed him to maintain good relations with the western Indians.⁶³ Meanwhile, the Americans continued preparations for the next phase of their conflict with the Indians in the Ohio Country. Arthur St. Clair requisitioned supplies and mustered soldiers for an ambitious assault targeting the Miami villages. The large American force moved slowly, its progress impeded by bad weather and its numbers dwindling as militia members deserted. Early in the morning on November 4, Indians executed a devastating attack against the Americans that is considered the most humiliating defeat ever suffered by the American army.⁶⁴

In the aftermath of their defeat of the Americans, Indians in the Ohio Country regrouped in a series of villages along the Maumee River known as The Glaize (near present-day Defiance, Ohio).⁶⁵ Later in 1792, this new center of militant Indian resistance was the site of a council where the confederacy renewed its commitment to resisting American expansion and cultivating support of like-minded Indian nations.⁶⁶ The council even drew Haudenosaunee people, who had worked diligently in preceding years to maintain their distance from the violence in the Ohio Country. The delegation that traveled west in Fall 1792 came together as the result of the extended negotiations between Haudenosaunee diplomats and Americans. Shortly after St. Clair's defeat, Timothy Pickering renewed an invitation he had extended during the summer 1791 council at Newtown Point, encouraging Haudenosaunee people to travel to Philadelphia and continue diplomatic negotiations. Pickering anticipated that a visit to the seat of government would awe Haudenosaunee people. While it is true that their time in Philadelphia was marked by significant pomp and circumstance, as several members of the delegation sat for portraits with John Trumbull and Red Jacket received his "peace medal," the surroundings did not distract the diplomats bent on airing their concerns.⁶⁷

Fifty Haudenosaunee people arrived in Philadelphia in mid-March 1792. Several days into their stay, President Washington addressed the delegation, welcoming them to the seat of government, affirming his desire for peace, and suggesting that Americans and Indians alike "must forget misunderstandings of the past."⁶⁸ On March 31, Red Jacket responded to the President's remarks. In doing so, he insisted that the assembled diplomats consider significant events of the recent past. Reminding the American audience of long-standing grievances that continued to shape interactions between Haudenosaunee people and the United States, the orator critiqued the peace accord that concluded the Revolutionary War, noting "when you Americans and the King made peace, he did not mention us and showed us no compassion."⁶⁹ The British abandoned their allies during negotiations, surrendering Indian territory from the eastern seaboard to the Mississippi River. Although Indian forces were winning battles against the Americans as the war came to a close, the Treaty of Paris declared that the United States had conquered British forces and their Indian allies. This agreement laid the groundwork for subsequent treaties where representatives of the United States dictated punitive land cessions based on conquest. For Red Jacket, the assembled Haudenosaunee delegation, and Indians throughout the northeast and Ohio Country, the "great pain & trouble" that followed the Revolution was a direct result of British and American actions. Challenging President Washington's earlier assertion that land cessions were "fairly made" through treaty negotiations, Haudenosaunee people gathered in Philadelphia used this meeting as an opportunity to underline the source of conflict.⁷⁰

Emphasizing the severity of the situation, Red Jacket invoked a familiar symbol of Haudenosaunee diplomacy when he observed “our chain of peace has been broken.”⁷¹ At the same time, the orator held out hope for the possibility of restoring peace. Red Jacket and other Haudenosaunee people appreciated American vulnerability in the wake of St. Clair’s defeat, and during the meetings in Philadelphia they saw a possibility to exert influence on events in the Ohio Country while reinforcing their own interests. In the months that followed, Haudenosaunee people traveled in Fall 1792 to The Glaize in an abortive attempt to sway the Indian confederacy to come to terms with the Americans. Records of that council show that their appeals were poorly received as Indians in the Ohio Country considered that Haudenosaunee people were unduly influenced by two years of negotiations with the Americans. Speaking in private council with some of the leading men, Farmer’s Brother shared concerns informed by Haudenosaunee experiences during the Revolutionary War. He reminded the assembled group that during that conflict “our lands were torn to pieces and the Americans triumphed as the greatest people in this great Island.”⁷² This warning had little influence on the course of events and Haudenosaunee people left The Glaize with nothing more to show for their efforts than an invitation to participate in a future council at Sandusky the following Spring.

In the months to come, Indians in the Ohio Country would follow their own counsel while Haudenosaunee people continued to pursue separate diplomatic initiatives. For their part, the Americans would authorize a diplomatic mission to Sandusky and also renew military preparations, constructing fortifications and expanding their forces. Although efforts for compromise and negotiation among the Indian nations resumed in spring 1793, little progress occurred and American forces moved further into the region in the intervening time. By 1794, General Anthony Wayne was well-positioned to respond when Indian attacks began in June of that year. Over the summer, the Americans repulsed attacks and, when their appeals for British support fell on deaf ears, the Indian resistance movement foundered.⁷³ In August 1794, General Wayne dealt a decisive blow in the struggle for the Ohio Country at the Battle of Fallen Timbers.

Haudenosaunee people, who continued to maintain their distance from the conflict, observed the wisdom of Farmer’s Brother’s remarks regarding the danger continuing violence posed to Indian people. In the Ohio Country, Indian lands and communities were “torn to pieces” during the decade of conflict following the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, and the 1795 Treaty of Greenville facilitated further American expansion in the region. Further to the east, Haudenosaunee people studiously avoided the ravages of ongoing war and instead developed a diplomatic strategy in their dealings with Americans. As 1794 drew to a close, several hundred Haudenosaunee people gathered at Canandaigua for a treaty council with Timothy Pickering. There they formalized an agreement that had been years in development. The Treaty of Canandaigua articulated the nation-to-nation relationship between the United States and the Haudenosaunee and resolved long-standing disputes regarding forced land cessions at the treaties of Fort Stanwix and Fort Harmar.⁷⁴ Although the treaty was not a panacea, by reinforcing Haudenosaunee sovereignty it strengthened the six nations’ position in ongoing negotiations with the emerging nation-state and secured a land base that (although diminished) continues to exist to this day.

NOTES

- 1 Helen A. Cooper, “John Trumbull’s Paintings of the American Revolution,” in *Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness: American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery*, ed. Helen A. Cooper (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 80. This celebratory image can also be found in the Capitol Rotunda, where a monumental painting based on the original work hangs in one of the niches.
- 2 Theodore Sizer, *The Works of Colonel John Trumbull: Artist of the American Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1950), 7.
- 3 Helen A. Cooper, “John Trumbull’s Portrait Miniatures,” in *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness: American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 96. Sizer, 7. Harry B. Wehle and Theodore Bolton, *American Miniatures, 1730–1850* (Garden City, NY: Pub. for the Metropolitan museum of art by Doubleday, Page & Company, 1927).
- 4 Yale University Art Gallery, “L L P H Floorplans October 2010,” (unpublished work in author’s collection).
- 5 For reproductions of the portrait miniatures, see Cooper, “John Trumbull’s Portrait Miniatures,” 99, 100, 105.
- 6 Trumbull’s Revolutionary War series includes *The Battle of Bunker Hill* (1786), *The Death of General Montgomery in the Attack on Quebec* (1786), *The Capture of the Hessians at Trenton* (1786–1828), *The Death of General Mercer at the Battle of Princeton* (ca. 1787–ca. 1831), *The Surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga* (ca. 1822–32), *The Surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown* (1787–ca. 1828), *The Resignation of General Washington* (1824–28). Reproductions and discussion of the paintings can be found in Cooper, “John Trumbull’s Paintings of the American Revolution.”
- 7 An overview of the post-Revolutionary War treaties can be found in Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Treaties: The History of a Political Anomaly* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), chapter two.
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- 32 As Red Jacket explained after reciting Pickering's gloss of the Constitution and federal legislation regarding Indian affairs, this practice was intended to insure that speeches were "rightly translated." The full text of this speech can be found in *ibid.*, 7–9.
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- 36 *Ibid.*, 15.

- 37 Isabel Kelsay, *Joseph Brant, 1743–1807: Man of Two Worlds* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 429–32.
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- 40 “Joseph Brant Ms. 11f204–5,” Draper Manuscript Collection. Quoted in Brooks, 124.
- 41 Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years’ War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000); Matthew C. Ward, *Breaking the Backcountry: The Seven Years’ War in Virginia and Pennsylvania, 1754–1765* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003); McConnell, chapters four and five.
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- 47 Josiah Harmar, “Harmar to Knox, May 17, 1787,” Josiah Harmar Papers; Josiah Harmar, “Harmar to Knox, December 9, 1787,” Josiah Harmar Papers; Josiah Harmar, “Harmar to Knox, June 17, 1788,” Josiah Harmar Papers. Census figures quoted in White, 418.
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- 52 A narrative of the campaign can be found in Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1972), chapter eight. For a detailed analysis of the twenty-eight Seneca settlements destroyed during the American invasion, see Kurt A. Jordan, “Seneca Iroquois Settlement Pattern, Community Structure, and Housing, 1677–1779,” *Northeast Anthropology* 67, (2004): 40–44.
- 53 Cornplanter, Half-Town, and Great-Tree, “Speech of the Cornplanter, Half-Town, and the Great Tree, Chiefs and Councillors of the Seneca Nation, to the Great Councillor of the Thirteen Fires, December 1, 1790,” in *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, ed. Walter Lowrie and Matthew S. Clarke (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1832), 1: 140.
- 54 Graymont, 213, 218.
- 55 “Proceedings of Council Held at Buffalo Creek between the Five Nations and the War Chiefs of the Cherokees and the Shawanese Indians 7th September, 1789,” Frontier Wars Series, Draper Collection, Series U, Vol. 23, p. 172–179, 187. State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI. Collected in *Iroquois Indians: A Documentary History of the Diplomacy of the Six Nations and the League*, ed. Francis Jennings, William N. Fenton, Mary A. Druke, and David R. Miller (50 reels of microfilm; Woodbridge, CT: Research Publications), reel 39.
- 56 Details regarding this violence can be found in correspondence between Henry Knox and George Washington in George Washington, *The Papers of George Washington*, ed. Theodore J. Crackel, vol. Presidential Series, Vol. 8 (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press), 80, 118. Additional discussion is found in Proctor.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

“SUCH THINGS OUGHT NOT TO BE”

The American Revolution and the First National Great Depression



Allan Kulikoff

Once upon a time, long ago, Americans suffered a mighty cataclysm. War tore the country apart; refugees and soldiers wandered the countryside; armies stole cattle and crops; people starved. Trade atrophied; money lost its value; jobs disappeared, as employers—not knowing if they could sell what they made or hire workers—cut production. The war ended, but the misery continued: deflation ruined thousands of debtors, their homes foreclosed; the rich made a new government and prospered, while the poor and middling sorts suffered. Hardly a fairy tale, these events make up our first Great Depression. Starting in 1776, it continued a quarter century, with severe recessions during the war years and from 1785 through 1788, followed by recovery and prosperity in the 1790s, but no full return to the average wealth and income of 1774 until after 1800. This depression seared the memories of all who lived through it. But almost no one knows about it today. Schoolchildren learn about the heroics and privations of Continental soldiers; their parents read best-selling biographies of Washington, Adams, and Franklin. Professional historians, bent on discussing political ideas or social change, downplay the war, while historical economists, seeking firm data, shy away from it.¹

The term “Great Depression” fits: in 1936, John Maynard Keynes defined a Great Depression as an economy “subject to severe fluctuations in respect to output and employment,” one “remaining in a chronic condition of subnormal activity for a considerable period without any marked tendency either towards recovery or towards complete collapse.” In 2008, the *Economist* dubbed a depression “a decline in real GDP that exceeds 10%, or one that lasts more than three years.” In 2012, Paul Krugman explained that although periods of economic growth occur during a Great Depression, the economy remains below its former peak. A Great Depression, so defined, characterized the revolutionary era: income and production dropped more than twenty percent between 1774 and 1800.²

The Depression followed an era of prosperity in the oldest regions, where staple agriculture and invisible returns on commerce added to wealth. In these places, the per-capita income of free families grew, on average 0.3 to 0.6 percent a year, most rapidly from 1740 to 1775; on frontiers, however, income and wealth at best stagnated. Improved living standards permeated older settlements. New England wages

rose, as women gained new opportunities in weaving, tailoring, and school-teaching; wealth rose in Maryland tobacco counties. By 1774, free colonists enjoyed a standard of living higher than England's. Colonial per capita income reached \$2,300 (2011 dollars). New Englanders, lacking staples, had lower incomes, \$1,540 per capita; the wheat-growing middle colonies, \$1,740; and the staple-producing South, \$2,890. The middle colonies, however, had cheaper foodstuffs, allowing them to attain a standard of living similar to the South.

Farm improvement drove growth in settled areas: farmers constructed outbuildings, built fences, and cleared land. Markets for farm products grew rapidly: farmers sold foodstuffs to burgeoning New England towns and provisioned New York and Philadelphia. Growing foreign demand for tobacco, rice, and wheat improved farm income. Townsfolk and farmers in town hinterlands prospered during the wars against the French, provisioning British and colonial armies. As shipping costs and the price of British manufactured goods declined, colonists bought finer cloth, looking glasses, and knives and forks.³

Slaves, servants, tenants, cottagers, sailors, fishermen, wage laborers, the wandering poor, and backcountry farmers shared little of this prosperity. Slaves not only remained unfree, but lived in inferior housing and consumed little. Sailors and fishermen stayed in port too briefly to accumulate assets. Cottagers—who mostly worked as wage laborers—swapped labor at harvest time for occupying a small house, pasturing a cow, and planting a small garden. Transients worked at harvests and other seasonal jobs, but gained no poor relief when unemployed, save in their place of birth; backcountry farmers often squatted on their lands, building neither equity nor wealth.⁴

Perhaps a quarter of free families lived on the edge of destitution. The poorest two-fifths of colonial households commanded a seventh to an eighth of total income, similar to that of England and Wales. Yet economic inequality was lower than in Britain, because the number of rich people remained small and small landholders attained a sufficiency. Where the top one percent of British householders had one-sixth to one-seventh of the income and the top tenth nearly half, in 1774, the top one percent of colonial householders had a fourteenth of the income and the richest tenth commanded three-tenths of colonial income.

In 1775, a downward spiral of reduced trade, monetary depreciation, and destruction reduced production and dried up credit. Armies requisitioned horses, livestock, and crops, taking surpluses farmers had traded with neighbors to get what they could not make themselves. They burned fences for firewood and houses of families in the line of battle, and welcomed the enemy's runaway slaves. At the same time, labor force participation plummeted as men enlisted for military service, slaves abandoned plantations, and immigration ceased, reducing production and rendering provision of cities and armies impossible.

When the war ended, farmers rebuilt herds and structures, and merchants remade trade networks. But state and national financial policies—deflationary monetary policies, funding state and national debt at par—kept small-scale farmers and artisans impoverished, reducing their ability to rebuild, expand their operations, and consume, while it enriched financiers, speculators, merchants, and manufacturers. Although these policies consolidated national debts and strengthened the financial sector, they helped keep farmers and artisans from improving their lot.

FOREIGN TRADE WAR AND DECLINING DOMESTIC MARKETS, 1775-1783

Embargoes, privateering, and blockades cut off foreign trade. After Congress and Parliament prohibited trade between the colonies and Britain and her West Indian colonies in 1775, commerce between the belligerents disappeared. British imports from all the continental colonies dropped from an annual average of £1.9 million in 1770-75, to £200,000 in 1776. From 1777 to 1782, when Britain could trade with only the places they controlled, they imported £82,000 of goods, nearly all from New York and Charleston. Tobacco imports, which had averaged a hundred million pounds in the early 1770s, dropped to fifteen million pounds in 1776 and 9.3 million pounds between 1777 and 1782. Between 1777 and 1780, little Carolina rice reached Britain; in 1781, after the British had occupied Charleston and its hinterland, Britain imported rice worth a fifth of pre-war levels.⁵

Although ports of other European powers and their colonies remained open, attempts to ship there faced a British blockade and privateers. The British captured 1,127 American vessels; American privateers seized 2,283 British vessels, similarly reducing British wartime commerce. With a three-thousand mile coastline, punctuated by countless bays, inlets, and rivers, the British Navy couldn't close down rebel shipping. But a few warships, placed at the mouth of estuaries, wreaked havoc. The British shut down trade in the Delaware and Chesapeake Bays for most of the war and blockaded Savannah and Charleston intermittently. By 1779, the navy had cut Philadelphia tonnage shipped to one-seventeenth of the pre-war average. Privateers and the blockade reduced exports to a trickle, forcing merchants out of business, and sending freight rates and insurance sky high (20 to 30 percent of the value shipped).⁶

Despite blockades and privateers, merchants shipped goods. To acquire gun powder, muskets, cloth, and blankets, states bought country produce, acquired ships, hired agents, and sent goods to the French, Spanish, and Dutch West Indies. The tobacco trade nonetheless withered away. Before the war, France and the Netherlands had each received 20 million pounds of Chesapeake tobacco, re-exported from Britain. Between 1778 and 1780, France imported 2.2 million pounds per year; from 1777 to 1779, 28.5 million pounds reached Amsterdam, arriving from the Dutch West India port of St. Eustatius, but the British captured it in 1781, ending the trade. Tobacco rotted in warehouses or burned in British raids. Without markets, planters stopped producing: as late as 1782-83, Virginia inspected 18.6 million pounds of tobacco, three-tenths of average exports, 1768-73.⁷

Mid-Atlantic grain farmers—who had sent 12,500 tons of bread and 167,000 bushels of wheat annually to southern Europe and 16,000 tons of bread to the British West Indies—had no better luck. Few exports got through until 1778, when a treaty between the United States and France led farmers to ship grain, meat, and flour to the French West Indies. But in 1778, Congress and the states, fearing that exports would leave the Continental Army to starve, embargoed grain and flour and confiscated flour for state use. Good crops and demand from Cuba (whose imports grew from 10,000 to 65,000 barrels from 1779 to 1783) and the French West Indies reinvigorated trade, but the British capture of St. Eustatius, and renewed blockade of the Chesapeake Bay, ended much of it.⁸

Table 7.1 Conjectural estimates of the atrophy of exports.

	1768–72 average, £	1777–82 average, £	Change	% change
Tobacco/rice	£1,078,000	£159,000	–£919,000	–85%
Grain/flour exports	£609,000	£120,000	–£489,000	–80%
Invisible earnings	£608,000	£80,000	–£528,000	–87%
Fish	£154,000	£0	–£154,000	–100%
Indigo	£112,000	£0	–£112,000	–100%
Meat/cattle	£72,000	£0	–£72,000	–100%
Total	£2,633,000	£359,000	–£2,274,000	–86%

1768–72: Shepherd and Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade*, 211–26. 1777–82: Tobacco: presuming a tripling of price due to wartime scarcities. Rice: at prewar prices. Grain/flour: a smuggling/success rate of 10 percent of volume, with prices double prewar levels. Invisible earnings: from insurance, presumed to be one-fifth the volume, at double prewar rates.

Exports had accounted for a tenth of colonial income; embargoes, blockades, and privateering reduced that by almost nine-tenths (Table 7.1). Not only did the tobacco, rice, grain, and flour trades plummet but fisheries—essential to the northern New England and Long Island economies—closed down as the British prevented American ships from going to fishing banks. The end of British bounties on indigo and naval stores made those trades less profitable, even if export had been possible. The sterling bills of exchange, tobacco notes, and manufactures trade had provided were lost; invisible earnings from insurance and shipping nearly disappeared. Unsurprisingly, shortages of cloth, armaments, and other goods soon appeared.⁹

Neither loans nor privateering made up the difference. European loans went for war materials, not into the pockets of Americans. Ports prospered from privateering, as did speculators who reaped most proceeds from ship condemnations. Ships captured by privateers, along with their cargoes, were supposedly worth \$18,000,000, some of the money in the ships themselves, an addition to capital stocks but not to income or domestic product. The revolutionaries lost shipping themselves, worth two-fifths of what they captured.¹⁰

Local exchange, city markets, and military demand did not replace foreign markets. In 1775 and 1776, Delaware Valley farmers marketed bumper crops of wheat to locals and to the army; while Philadelphia’s seaborne sale of grain and flour to New England collapsed, millers replaced it in part by overland trade and military sales. When the British invaded the Delaware Valley, they destroyed some mills, and General Washington ordered millstones removed and Brandywine Valley mills closed, halting trade for two years. During 1780, Baltimore merchants sent 131 vessels, carrying 3,196 tons of goods, to the Chesapeake Bay and North Atlantic Coast, but in 1781—as fighting raged—just eight ships, with 521 tons of goods, left for coastal ports. Long Island farmers, used to trading with New England, had to get licenses, granted to worthy Loyalists, from British occupiers to send produce northward.¹¹

Farmers, who refused to sell produce and grain in city markets beset by inflation, eagerly took their goods to British-occupied New York. Between 1778 and 1783, the British pumped £6.4 million sterling into the city’s economy. This is equal to a

billion 2011 dollars (using a consumer price index) or perhaps more accurately to \$87.8 billion dollars when compared to the size of the economy (that is, using the same percentage of GDP during the war years as it would be today). Paper money maintained a steady exchange with sterling: the prices of flour, pork, and other foodstuffs jumped seventy to two hundred percent, leading farmers to sell hay, wood, wheat, produce, butter, and meat. Farmers, hungry for specie and manufactured goods, nonetheless rarely supplied the needs of the British military, much less the civilian population.¹²

Contending armies consumed vast quantities of flour, meat, and hay. Between 1777 and 1781, 100,000 people (42,000 Continental soldiers; 41,000 British, German, and Loyalist troops; thousands of camp followers) served in military units. If mid-Atlantic farmers had provided wheat to make a pound of bread per day per soldier—which was typical Continental rations—they could have sold forty-five percent of average pre-war exports. That proportion that would have dropped to a quarter if armies reduced rations to four pounds a week, as the British did in 1781; substitution of rice for flour, as the Continental Army did in January 1780, eliminated the market.

Military demand for meat, vegetables, milk, fodder, and horses exceeded colonial surpluses. The colonies exported seven million pounds of meat a year; 80,000 soldiers required 16.6 million to 29.1 million pounds (presuming a four- to seven-pound weekly ration per man). Farmers could have sold an additional 12,000 cattle (400 pounds each) and 32,000 swine (150 pounds each) to meet the lower ration. Farmers had small surpluses of milk and butter; the Continental Army in Massachusetts in 1775, however, wanted to give soldiers a pint of milk a day, placing great burdens on farmers. Forage for the thousands of horses, along with meat on the hoof that the military used, created a huge market for hay: ten pounds of hay and a quarter bushel of grain per horse per day.¹³

The military market was neither reliable nor lucrative. The British usually stationed no more than 20,000 men in North America. Loyalists added 5,000 men; in 1780, that number jumped to 10,000. The Continental Army—which during peak months between 1775 and 1779 had 30,000 men—on occasion lost half of its strength, only to build up again. Between 1779 and 1781, the army plummeted from 24,000 to fewer than 10,000 men. Militia units mobilized when a threat appeared then disbanded. At war's end, the French Army never numbered more than 7,800 men (and 4,200 sailors), and thus did not replace the market that the Continental Army once provided.¹⁴

Small armies did consume vast quantities of provisions: between December 1777 and June 1778, the main Continental Army used 925,000 pounds of flour and bread and 800,000 pounds of meat and fish a month. Farmers also sold to the British. Connecticut, Long Island, New Jersey, and Delaware Valley farmers swapped food to the armies that occupied New York and Philadelphia for manufactured goods. Rather than suffer confiscation of their goods, Eastern Shore Virginia planters sold the British provisions, as did Tidewater planters, who craved hard money, when Cornwallis reached Virginia. Other farmers went aboard British war ships to truck: in 1775, Queens County farmers sent provisions to British ships sitting in New York harbor, where Governor Tryon had fled; such trade continued unabated, with Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland farmers all selling to the British army.

More provisions reached British ships when Newport and New York City swapped farm goods in early 1776 for promises not to burn their towns.¹⁵

Such sales continued through the war. Hudson Valley landlords sold 87,000 bushels of wheat and 20,000 barrels of flour to the army in Spring 1777. During Winter 1778, farmers took food to British-held Philadelphia, risking confiscation and military justice if caught by patriot army patrols. The Continental Army's best efforts barely stemmed this avalanche of goods. Farmers hid provisions from the Continentals, and when they thought the way clear, carried them to the city. Farm women, allowed to go to Philadelphia to succor American prisoners, brought yet more trade goods into the city. Other farmers supplied the patriots. During the Valley Forge winter, New Englanders drove cattle to Pennsylvania. Northampton County, Pennsylvania farmers and New Jersey farmers sold the army provisions during winter 1778–79. In winter 1778, Maryland farmers sold so many cattle to state agents that they temporarily ceased purchases. Between 1781 and 1783, Shenandoah Valley farmers exchanged at least 232,000 pounds of flour and 566,000 pounds of beef for state certificates that the army used to feed troops and British prisoners housed there.¹⁶

MONETARY DEPRECIATION

The inflation of Continental paper money complicated trade, made credit scarce, and reduced farmers' willingness to sell to the army or city workers. The \$199,999,000 in Continental currency Congress emitted traded at par in 1775, rose to \$1.5 per dollar of specie by late 1776, and reached a ratio of five to one by the end of 1777. After the battle of Saratoga and the beginnings of the French alliance, Americans thought the war might end soon, and with it the redemption of the Continentals. The specie value of emitted Continentals rose. But when the British launched an invasion of the South and the French left to fight in the West Indies, Continentals became worthless, trading at one hundred to one by December 1780. As money depreciated, Congress made ever-larger emissions: \$108.5 million in 1779 (\$544 per household, \$10.88 in specie). By mid-1781, the money had ceased to circulate, save as speculative paper.¹⁷

Since the states never allowed Congress to levy taxes or tariffs, the national government had no independent revenue, leaving it with no alternative but to print money. To get foreign loans, it had to prove its credit-worthiness, which the power to tax or military victory would bring, or establish a central bank to provide loans. Continental currency provided almost nine-tenths of American revenue from 1775 to 1777, but only a third from 1778 to 1781. After the Battle of Saratoga, Congress received French and Dutch loans, but they filled only a fourteenth to a twelfth of the Confederation budget in 1778–81. Instead, bonds and certificates (IOUs given for goods confiscated from farmers and artisans) jumped from an eighth of revenue in 1775–77, to more than half in 1778–81.¹⁸

In a vain attempt to stop depreciation of the Continentals, Congress urged states to make them legal tender. It also attempted to raise money by taxes, cease emitting paper money, and retire what it had printed. Eight states began to tax and reduced their paper money emissions in 1777, but emissions increased thereafter, mostly from southern states. Thru 1779, they put out almost \$54.4 million, just over a quarter

of the total for Continentals; in 1780, after the demise of the Continental, states like Pennsylvania and Virginia increased their emissions. By December 1780, New England, mid-Atlantic, and Virginia currencies traded at seventy-four or seventy-five to one Spanish dollar, Maryland's at a hundred to one, and North Carolina's at two hundred to one.¹⁹

As Continentals and state paper issuances depreciated, householders became less willing to accept them. Farmers and artisans had bought products on "book credit" (a notation in a merchant's or neighbor's account book) and eventually paid with crops, home manufactures, or labor. Such accounting required a stable exchange rate with specie. As depreciation accelerated, Continentals disappeared as a money of account, credit vanished, and the relationship between book credit and paper money, specie, bills of exchange, and bonds broke down. Not surprisingly, farmers in New England, Maryland, and Philadelphia's hinterland refused to sell their crops for anything but specie or imported goods whenever they could.²⁰

Inflation also reduced urban markets. Wages of laborers and artisans did not keep up with the depreciation of the Continental. City governments like Philadelphia's tried to regulate the prices they paid for food, but farmer and merchant resistance doomed price controls. Similar New Hampshire price regulation led farmers to hoard their corn. In 1779, Stratham, New Hampshire minister Samuel Lane reported "a Remarkable great Crop of Indian Corn," but he lamented that "people in Seaport Towns are ready to perish for want of food for people seem to have Such a poor Esteem of paper Money, that they will not carry in their provisions (thou' plenty) for it."²¹

Farmers received at least \$95,000,000 (\$3.7 million specie) in certificates, but they redeemed them with difficulty and at low prices. The debasement of the Continental led Congress, in December 1777, to urge state legislatures to allow local officials or the army to take provisions, stock, clothing, shoes, and blankets it needed from farm and artisan families. From 1778 through 1783, the army provisioned itself with such requisitions. Those requisitioning goods gave printed certificates for future payment, listing quantities and prices of goods taken. Payment remained difficult. New York Whig leader Robert R. Livingston conceded in 1778 that certificates "lost their credit from the uncertainty and difficulty that attends their payment." From 1778 through 1782, similar examples can be found in seven other states. New Jersey farmers particularly disliked certificates. When General Anthony Wayne led an expedition to southern New Jersey for cattle in February 1778, he and his 500 men collected only 130 animals because farmers hid their cattle; those whose cattle they took grudgingly accepted certificates.²²

FARM MANAGEMENT THROUGH WAR AND DEPRESSION

Before the Revolution, most farmers not only sent surpluses or staples to market but exchanged among themselves, creating a "borrowing system." No farm family could subsist on its own labor or achieve self-sufficiency, but needed to trade surpluses with neighbors to get food, fiber, clothing, or labor. Farm women swapped butter for harvest labor, while menfolk exchanged smithing work for corn. Armies ignored evidence of dearth and saw vast supplies where none existed, accusing farmers of

avarice and hoarding and insisting upon leaving them with just enough food, forage, and livestock for familial subsistence.²³

By confiscating farm surpluses, armies made local exchange impossible and impoverished farmers, already struck hard by embargoes, plunder, and inflation. Repeated army incursions stripped farm country of food. Legislators, who understood the ubiquity of the borrowing system, tried to prevent indiscriminate impressment of horses, carts, wheat, and cattle. New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Pennsylvania laws prohibited army officers from impressing goods, ordered judges to take goods equitably, and allowed locals to determine how much farmers might spare.²⁴

As stable markets disappeared, small farmers pursued subsistence and aimed at communal sufficiency. Backcountry grain farmers grew more vegetables and fruit and made more butter and meat. Hard pressed by the war, central New Jersey farmers diversified, growing corn and wheat, raising fowl, pigs, cows, and sheep. But despite the heavy military demand for fodder, few made hay. Unlike most New Yorkers, Ulster County farmers enjoyed peace. The Continental Army bivouacked nearby, providing a market for farm goods and textiles. Despite this market, they relied more heavily on local exchange than before the war: only a twentieth of the goods purchased in a local store came from area households, a quarter the pre-war proportion. Most farmers, who sold intermittently to the army, intensified subsistence production, making wheat, herding livestock, milking cows and churning butter, and spinning thread, while still trading surpluses to neighbors.²⁵

Southern planters abandoned staples and pursued subsistence. Some Chesapeake tobacco planters turned to corn and wheat; others grew tobacco and hoped the war would end; but most cut back on market production to supply their families with food, cider, and cloth. Albemarle County, Virginia planters grew corn, wheat, tobacco, rice, and cotton; used corn stalks as fodder; raised pigs and shot wild turkeys; cultivated vegetable gardens and harvested peaches, cherries, and other fruits. Pressured by slaves who threatened to run away, Lowcountry rice planters allowed them to make their own food and grow cotton to clothe themselves; Chesapeake slave women had similar opportunities.²⁶

With imports cut off, farm families allocated more time to cloth making. Colonial farm families had imported nearly all the cloth they used, but they had made small quantities, the women spinning wool, linen, or cotton, taking it to a weaver, using or exchanging the cloth for other goods. The 1774 rage for homespun lasted through the war, fed by the necessity of replacing cloth imports. With cloth so time-consuming to make, farm families at best replaced the cloth they had bought. A small part of this home-spun cloth entered the borrowing system; a tinier part reached the market.²⁷

Soldiers—whose clothing and shoes rotted from forced marches, rainy weather, and constant wear—needed constant infusions of blankets, shirts, coats, shoes and stockings. When Congress demanded each state send the army clothing or cloth, states allocated quotas to towns or counties. But farm families could not meet this demand. Local producers made so little clothing that officials seized old clothing and blankets from farmers and relied on captured British ships and French imports. Few imports arrived until 1778, but privateers made up some of the deficit. During the Valley Forge winter, General Washington authorized “small seizures” of clothing, shoes, and blankets from disaffected Chester County farmers, and later New Jersey and Pennsylvania officials attempted to impress clothing, with limited success. Poor

quality French shoes arrived during the Valley Forge winter, and shipments from France and Holland reached New Hampshire in May 1778 with 13,000 coats, waistcoats, and breeches and 15,000 stockings, but the first uniforms to reach the army came in a fall 1778 French shipment. Desperate for clothing by April 1780, the Army bought two thousand British-manufactured blankets from New York City and reveled in the capture of a prize laden with clothing. Shipments—like one from Spain in June 1781—arrived, intermittently, though the war.²⁸

* * *

In sum, wartime destruction and military impressment was massive. Almost no place was unscathed. Raids, battles, and thievery destroyed maritime property in Maine, laid Connecticut towns bare, made Long Island life precarious, turned Westchester County, New York, into a no man's land, repeatedly overran inhabited parts of New Jersey, laid southeast Pennsylvania barren, disrupted Chesapeake plantations, and ruined Carolina backcountry farms. Farmers faced repeated demands from both armies for grain, livestock, fodder, cloth, clothing, and shoes. Armies requisitioned thousands of heads of livestock and moved cattle at the first news the enemy was nearby—and often that cattle disappeared. Hungry soldiers stole food and liberated fowl, hogs, and cattle, leaving families to starve. Cold soldiers chopped down fences for firewood, allowing livestock and wild animals to trample crops. The armies called these actions plunder, and often punished participants, on rare occasion by hanging. But farmers could not tell the difference between plunder and requisitions.²⁹

REDUCED LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND LABOR PRODUCTIVITY

If farmers had fully supplied both sides, along with town populations, they could have replaced lost markets. But they could command too little labor to do so. Slaves ran away or refused to work; immigration of Europeans, who had worked on northern farms, ceased; armies drafted young men who otherwise worked on farms or in shops. A majority of laborers stayed in the labor market, but farmers—unable to predict the size of the labor pool—reduced planting.

Before the Revolution, servants—nearly all British or German immigrants—labored for mid-Atlantic and Chesapeake wheat and truck farmers, and skilled servants worked as craftsmen on Chesapeake plantations. The war ended immigration: in late 1775, the British prohibited emigration to the colonies and few ship masters brought Germans. The British ban was effective: in September 1775, 1,115 people left Britain for the thirteen colonies, five emigrated in October, and none from November through March 1776. Since servant immigration reached a high level just before the war, many servants still had time to serve, but by the late 1770s, the servant supply plummeted: bound servants in Chester County, Pennsylvania dropped from 436 in 1775 to 43 in 1779.³⁰

Indentured servants rushed to join armies. In 1777, numerous Chester County servants absconded to join General William Howe's British Army as it marched to Philadelphia. More enlisted in the Continental Army: desperate for men, the army enlisted servants. Congress set recruits free and offered them land in return for

service, but urged states to pay masters for the labor they lost. Rhode Island, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland allowed servants to enlist without the masters' permission but mandated compensation; New York and (later) Maryland insisted servants gain masters' permission, but paid no compensation. Northern Virginia partially filled its 1777 quotas with “Convict Servants, purchased from their Masters by the Recruiting Officers.” More than a seventh of Maryland's convict servants joined General Smallwood's regiment, but indentured servants—available by 1777 only to serve as substitutes for their masters—waited until their terms had expired.³¹

The Revolutionary War disrupted slavery more. In 1775, at least half of Chesapeake farm operators owned slaves. Others hired slaves for craft or domestic work, annual farm labor, or planting and harvesting. A higher proportion of families in the Lowcountry—where nine-tenths of the population was enslaved—held slaves. The labor of northern slaves was as essential. During the 1770s, nearly two-fifths of the households of eastern Chester County owned a slave or two. More male slaves than free white laborers or indentured servants worked on farms in three late colonial New Jersey counties, and slave women worked both in the house and fields. In other parts of the mid-Atlantic, as many as a tenth of the households owned one or two slaves.³²

The outbreak of war halted the Atlantic slave trade and the long-distance movement of slaves within the South. Rapid natural increase supplied the Chesapeake region with slaves, but backcountry Carolina planters—who had imported 41,000 Africans between 1760 and 1775—clamored for more. When generals promised each private an adult slave from confiscated loyalist estates and British garrisons, backcountry South Carolinians unable to buy slaves enthusiastically joined patriot militias and the Continental Army, filling three regiments. Many received slaves; others had to take state treasury certificates instead. Thereafter, small planters refused to enlist without a slave bounty. Eager to own slaves, backcountry troops stole slaves from patriot and loyalist masters alike. Such thievery hardly sated the desire of frontier families for slaves, as the post-war resumption of the Atlantic slave trade attests.³³

Craving freedom, thousands of slaves took advantage of war to run away. Before the war, slaves—nearly all men, mostly youths—often left plantations, seeking freedom in towns, joining Indians or establishing maroons in the swamps, but few escaped permanently. The war opened up new opportunities for slaves. Thousands joined British armies or were impressed by them. Wherever the British army invaded, slaves ran to join. British officials and commanders urged slave men to leave rebel masters. In late 1775, John Murray, Lord Dunmore, Virginia's last royal governor, promised freedom to any slave man who joined his army; a thousand (including women and children) reached the British camp; at least three hundred men fought the rebels, took part in foraging, or participated in plunder. The experiment ended badly: many died of disease. Later in the war, British generals William Howe and Henry Clinton promised freedom to women and children as well as fighting men. Thousands either ran to the British or were carried off by them during the 1779 invasion of South Carolina; that year, the British impressed 750 slaves to help defend Savannah from recapture by a French fleet. By July 1780, British regiments included 1,500 black soldiers. In Summer 1781, slaves flocked to British lines at Yorktown,

but the British forced them from camp when provisions ran low, leaving many to starve, die of smallpox, or face recapture. Young slave men, including runaways, rushed to join American and French armies, believing that service for country would bring them the freedom they craved. Many served in the Continental Army at the behest of their masters, as substitutes or for the land bounties the master received. Others ran away and enlisted on their own. Throughout the war, five thousand enlisted in the Continental Army, and five hundred Virginia blacks were drafted into Virginia state forces.³⁴

The war opened up new opportunities for women and children to escape slavery. Before the war, one in twelve advertised New York and New Jersey runaways were women; between 1776 and 1783, women constituted a fifth of the runaways. For the first time, some left in family units: the proportion of children under sixteen jumped from one in twenty before the war, to one in five during the war. Proportionately more women (a third) and children (one-quarter) were among the three thousand ex-slaves the British evacuated from New York City in 1783. A third of these runaways left as couples or in family groups. Revolutionary era runaways cut more deeply into the labor supply than pre-Revolutionary runaways. Women and children had not only been a mainstay of the labor of small farmers, helping with field work and the wife's household labor, but every woman of childbearing age who reached freedom reduced the potential size of the family labor force.³⁵

Slave-owners, desperate to keep their labor force, kept slaves with them. Before the war began, slave holders feared their slaves would rise up against them. Their fears—grounded in the reality that slaves joined the British army, met secretly, and fomented several conspiracies—led them to exaggerate the danger of a slave uprising. Although most slaves stayed put, masters could never be certain they would. With slave labor insecure, they were uncertain that crops would be planted or harvested.³⁶

The loss of slaves—runaways, enlistees, slaves requisitioned for labor—numbered 30,000, a tenth of all working-age slaves. Some 20,000 fled bondage, and a much higher percentage of runaways escaped permanently than before, rendering the labor supply of the South and the Mid-Atlantic States precarious. About 6,000 Virginia slaves, most from the Eastern Shore and the James River basin, reached British lines; an equal number of Carolina and Georgia slaves escaped to the British, the Carolina backcountry, or Florida; five thousand others abandoned Pennsylvania, Maryland, and the northern states, most arriving in New York City. Several thousand others found berths in British naval vessels. Many died from hunger, disease, or battle wounds, and masters captured others, but masters rarely recovered slaves who reached enemy lines. After the war, the British protected runaways from masters who claimed them. Over 3,000 survivors left with the British from New York at the end of the war and another 11,000, including many slaves of Loyalists, departed Savannah and Charleston.³⁷

At the same time as servants and slaves ran off, armies and militias cut deeply into family and hired labor, leaving farms in planting or harvesting seasons with only women, children, and older men. About 200,000 men—a third of all whites over age sixteen—enlisted in the Continental Army or served in a state militia. They served 396,000 separate terms, repeatedly disrupting labor supplies. As many as 30,000 to 50,000 others joined the British Army or loyalist partisan bands.³⁸

The Continental Army attracted the backbone of hired farm labor: young, poor, landless men; laborers; immigrants; craftsmen; servants; slaves; and free blacks. The army recruited recent immigrants, especially servants and ex-servants, for long-term service. A quarter of Continental soldiers had been born in Ireland and an eighth in Germany. Laborers made up two-fifths of New York's third regiment in 1775 and two-thirds of Delaware soldiers in 1782. Men who enlisted in the New Jersey Line came from the poorest families in the state: nearly three-fifths of the soldiers or their families held no land.³⁹

Military service took men away at planting, weeding, or harvest times. Continental Army recruits served several years or more; militia recruits stayed a few months at a time, serving perhaps a year in total. Virginia Continental Army recruits spent, on average, 27 months in uniform, while militia volunteers or draftees endured thirteen months, spread over several terms of service. Even short terms interfered with the seasonal rhythms of farm life: farmers never knew if a son or a hired hand might be drafted. The call for men to fight at White Plains came during the 1776 Concord, Massachusetts' harvest. Fighting around Augusta, Georgia, in late October 1781, threatened to ruin the harvest; unless “a sufficient number of our men remain at home & cultivate their farms,” General John Twiggs reported, “there will not be provision raised to support the few inhabitants.”⁴⁰

Seeking to make a fortune from prizes, young men living near the coast joined privateers, serving as many as 70,000 tours of duty, further reducing the labor supply. William Whipple, a New Hampshire member of Congress, complained in July 1778 that because of privateering, “the farmers cannot hire a labourer for less than 50 or 40 dollars per month, and in the neighborhood of this town, 3 or 4 dollars per day, and very difficult to be had at that. This naturally raises the price of provision, Indian corn is not to be purchased for under 6 dollars a bushel.”⁴¹

Poor women—otherwise available for harvest labor, carrying water, churning butter, and caring for children—filled military camps. They took crucial military jobs—cooking, washing, sewing, nursing; they marched with armies, carrying supplies or stayed behind in squalid camps; sold liquor, adding to camp drunkenness; joined men in plundering; occasionally spied on the enemy. British and Loyalist units recruited American women and succored wives of Loyalist refugees. In 1777 and 1781, women constituted an eighth of the British army and their children nearly a tenth. At least 20,000 women, four percent of white women in the new states, served in the Continental Army. Besides domestic tasks, they carried ammunition for canons and water to swab them down; several hundred women disguised themselves as men and joined the infantry.⁴²

The war had a catastrophic impact on the labor supply. Between 25,000 and 35,000 patriot and 10,000 British soldiers (a sixth of them Loyalists) died in captivity or from battle wounds, surgery, or diseases. Proportionately more men died from wounds—one percent of the 1780 population and an eighth of the participants—than in any American war except the Civil War, equivalent to 3.2 million deaths in the 2013 population. At least 8,445 Continentals and patriot militia were wounded in battle. Combat wounds could lead to permanent disability. Most survivors suffered wounds in shoulders, arms, wrists, hands, thighs, knees, legs, ankles, or feet, rendering them lame or making walking, lifting, or carrying—motions essential to farm work—difficult. Often survivors could no longer do farm work, particularly because

wounds stayed opened or reopened years later due to the limitations of eighteenth-century medical care.⁴³

Wounded men unable to work were a burden on their families and communities. Several thousand veterans received disability pensions. As early as 1775, injured New Hampshire men poured back to their home towns, three-fifths of them in their late teens or twenties, who in peacetime would have started families, made farms, and built capital. Four-fifths of a sample of 86 New Hampshire pensioners received state aid for battle wounds, seven-tenths of them in bodily extremities, three fifths of these injuries to arms or hands. The rest went blind or lame from inoculations, had amputated

Table 7.2 Conjectural civilian labor force participation, 1776–1780.

	<i>White laborers</i>	<i>Heads household</i>	<i>Slaves</i>	<i>White women</i>	<i>Total</i>
January 1776	167,000 15.2%	335,000 30.7%	300,000 27.5%	290,000 26.6%	1,092,000 100%
Natural increase	+17,300	+35,000	+25,000	+30,000	+107,300
Refugees	-1,800	-3,600	—	-6,400	-11,800
Runaways	—	—	-16,000	—	-16,000
Military deaths	-17,600	-4,400	—	—	-22,000
Military service	-26,400	-6,600	-2,500	-3,000	-38,500
Serve on privateers	-8,000	-2,000	—	—	-10,000
Injuries	-4,500	-900	—	—	-5,400
1780	126,000 11.5%	352,500 32.3%	306,500 28%	310,600 28.3%	1,095,600 100%
% change, 1776–80	-24.6%	+5.0%	+2.2%	+7.1%	1,095,600

Population data: Department of Commerce, *Historical Statistics* 2: 1168. To get from 1770 to 1776, I presume a 2.5 percent growth rate for the white population and add European immigrants from Aaron Fogleman, “Migrations to the Thirteen British North American Colonies: New Estimates,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22 (1992): 698. I presume a rate of 2 percent for slaves, adding in the slave trade estimate from Fogleman. I divide the population by age: half the whites over and half under 16; I get the number of household heads by dividing the white population by 6. Slave population: adults are presumed to be 55 percent (sex ratios about 120), children 45 percent, of whom 30 percent 0–9 years old and 15 percent, 10–15 years old. Labor force participation: all slaves (men at 1.0; women and boys 10–16 at 0.75; girls 10–16 at 0.5); all white men over 16 counted as full-time workers; all white women in labor force (15–22 at 0.75; 23 on at 0.5). The estimates of labor lost are prorated to a six-year war or for years to 1780. For military service: terms = 396,000 estimated at six months each, divided by 12 and then divided by 6 for number of years lost. Runaways: presumed to be a fifth children, a fifth women, and the rest men. Men under arms and in privateers: a fifth presumed to be married heads of household. Estimate of 8,445 war wounds to Continentals; presume that militiamen suffered one-third that rate and Loyalists one-fourth. Refugees: 60,000 at the end of the war, subtract 20,000 in New York City who were able to make a living. Five-sixths of the remainder were refugees in 1780, unable to fully secure a living; this 33,000, distributed as follows: children, one-half; women, two-thirds of remainder; men distributed as in population. Military deaths include those from infection and disease, but I have not estimated civilian deaths by disease.

limbs, or fell from horses. As their wounds festered, they remained a burden. They began receiving pensions almost as soon as they returned home, and many still needed help as they entered their forties, when they should have been accumulating assets to bequeath to their families.⁴⁴

* * *

In sum, the war had a tremendous effect on the labor force. Labor force participation during the war years shrank, as immigration ceased, men went off to war, slaves ran away, and Tories left the country. Deaths, debilitating injuries, and Tory refugees permanently reduced the labor force; once the war ended, however, military men could return home and resume working. In 1776, 1.1 million people participated in the labor force: a quarter slaves, an equal proportion white women, the rest white men; a seventh were waged laborers, the rest heads of household (Table 7.2). Population grew during the war years; even as the number of households rose by a twentieth, the number of laborers (including those absent for months) at best stayed the same. The number of white laborers dropped by a quarter, leaving women, children, and older men to run workshops and farms. Slave labor probably continued to grow, but since slaves sometimes refused to work and often ran away, masters could not count on them. The number of female workers grew faster than any other group.

RECOVERY AND THE PERPETUATION OF POVERTY

War left the country in shambles. In late 1780, two and a half years after fighting around Philadelphia ceased, burned-out houses still lined the road to the city. The British so decimated parts of Rhode Island that the number of sheep dropped from 7,000 before the war to 300 in 1786. After the war, 1,335 New Jersey householders in five counties filed claims for damages armies had made. Nearly a third of Bergen County householders, home of vicious warfare, reported damage; as did a sixth in Middlesex, near the Continentals' 1780 winter encampment, and a tenth in Burlington, scene of foraging from Valley Forge; and Essex, where the British raided. Troops took hay or corn for their horses on two-fifths of the farms; requisitioned, stole, or slaughtered milk cows, sheep, and hogs of nearly every petitioning farmer; and filched dunghill fowl, turkeys, ducks, or geese on a quarter of the farms.⁴⁵

Not only did farmers have to rebuild burned out barns and houses, replace torn out fences, build up livestock herds, replant orchards, and clear and plant new fields, but townsfolk had to rebuild cities burned during the war. As farmers remade regional markets, merchants replaced foreign markets lost when they left the British Empire, negotiating complex and changing mercantilist trade rules that regulated goods the United States might import or export and precluded United States' ships or traders, or both, from Great Britain, European states, and their American colonies.⁴⁶

Recovery began when British imports of manufactures, cloth, and hardware, poured into the new nation. To pay for such goods, Americans exported grain, flour, rice, and tobacco, much of it to new markets and re-exported cloth, coffee, tea, and other products. Exports to Europe doubled from 14 to 30 percent, and shipping to the French and Spanish West Indies reached 24 percent; until the Haitian Revolution,

Saint Domingue was the best market, buying two-thirds or more of American exported livestock, fish, and beef in 1790. Exports to Britain declined from 58 percent in 1768–72 to 31 percent in 1790–92. In sum, the value of American exports rose by nearly two-fifths, improving its pre-war trade, but increasing less than population, which grew by four-fifths.⁴⁷

Between 1783 and 1790, farmers built up livestock and horse herds, replacing animals armies confiscated. Massachusetts farmers had the same number of “neat cattle” in 1771 and 1792, but it took until 1800 for the number of horses to return to pre-war totals. A comparison of the annual export of pork, beef, cattle, and horses in 1768–72 and 1790–92 documents broader recovery: the country exported, on average, 26,036 barrels of pork and beef before the war and 90,198 barrels in the early 1790s, growth two fifths greater than population. Cattle and horse exports recovered: the number of exported cattle rose from 3,433 to 4,681 and horses increased from 6,048 to 7,086, an achievement, given their hard use by armies.⁴⁸

Recovery was uneven. Per capita exports from the mid-Atlantic region (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and adjacent Delaware and Maryland) jumped by three-tenths, better than any other American region. With surging demand for bread, grain, and meat in the West Indies, intermittent European dearth, and demand from armies in the Napoleonic wars, the region’s wheat farmers, millers, and grain exporters prospered. Flour and bread exports jumped by three quarters between 1768–72 and 1790–92, becoming the biggest American export; wheat exports grew by two-thirds.⁴⁹

Flour milling became a mainstay of the Philadelphia and Baltimore economies, enriching farmers able to send their grain there, along with millers and merchants who processed and shipped it. In 1790, nearly two-thirds of flour exports left from Pennsylvania and Maryland; two-fifths of the corn came from Pennsylvania and New York. Millers, flush with profitable flour, built huge mills and mechanized production. By the early 1790s, more than a hundred mills had adopted automated machines—elevators that moved grain and flour between mill floors for cleaning, grinding, and drying and automated rakes to dry the flour. Only rich men could afford mechanization: equipment and other startup costs for a mechanized mill ran \$8,000 (\$207,000 2012 dollars).⁵⁰

A great reversal took place in the South. Between 1768–72 and 1790–92, the per capita value of southern exports fell by two-fifths in the Chesapeake and by half in the Carolinas and Georgia. While the South’s population share stayed the same between 1774 and 1799, its share of national wealth dropped from over half to less than a third. The region’s per capita wealth, exclusive of slaves, declined from 14.5 percent above the national average to 36 percent below. The Carolinas, Georgia, and parts of Virginia had suffered great destruction, but no more than New Jersey and parts of New York and Pennsylvania. As it spread from the Chesapeake to the upcountry Carolinas and Georgia, tobacco production reached a new peak in 1790–92, a quarter greater than before the war. South Carolina indigo production dropped by a tenth; rice—more important in Lowcountry Carolina and Georgia—returned to prewar quantities and value.⁵¹

Although foreign trade rebounded, per capita income suggests economic disaster continued through the 1790s. In 1774, per capita income amounted to \$2,140 to \$2,350 (2012 dollars). Where colonial income and wealth had surpassed that of the mother country by 1774, it fell behind after the war. In 1790, with agricultural

recovery completed, per capita income had plunged to \$1,200, more than two-fifths lower, equal to the early years of the Great Depression of the 1930s. (Alternative estimates place the drop in GDP per capita at a fifth to a third). Recovery picked up in the 1790s, with increased exports and a booming financial and industrial sector. But as late as 1800 or 1805, per capita income had reached only \$1,800—a fifth lower than in 1774 and an annual decline of 0.85 percent.⁵²

Why did the farm economy remain depressed in the 1790s, after crop production and trade rebounded? Impoverished farmers struggled to rebuild and pay taxes and debts that had been shoved aside during the war. States retired their wartime currency issues, sometimes turning the money into interest-bearing bonds. Or they accepted certificates for purchase of confiscated Loyalist estates or unallocated land, further reducing liquidity. The money supply withered away, leading to deflation (reduction in the specie value of goods). Just when farmers and artisans needed money to pay taxes and their debts in hard money, they had little of it. Responding to farmers, who wanted to pay taxes in paper money, seven state legislatures passed new emissions in the mid-1780s, five of them establishing land banks, loaning bills of credit on the security of the value of land. Rhode Island, North Carolina, and Georgia paper money depreciated, but New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina money held most of its value.⁵³

Whether the money depreciated or not, the amounts emitted proved too small to prevent continued deflation. Rhode Island merchants refused to take the state's currency, rendering the new issue worthless, except to pay taxes. Pennsylvania issued new emissions of paper money—\$130,000 in a land bank backed by mortgages, \$270,000 backed by taxes—but the quantity in circulation fell from around \$5.30 per capita before the war to \$1.90 in 1786. Farmers had to pay six percent interest on land bank loans and could hold them for eight years, worse terms than pre-war emissions. Such scarcity struck western farmers particularly severely: farmers near Pittsburgh, Lancaster, and Carlisle Pennsylvania had too little cash to reimburse shopkeepers; merchants and farmers nationwide reported similar woes.⁵⁴

Many states and later the national government funded war loans at par, even though they had depreciated mightily (several, however, reduced the debt through depreciation tables). States could pay their share of national debts or the interest on state debts, much less retire them, only by raising taxes. A 1785 Federal requisition of \$3 million to the states, seven-tenths of which was destined to pay bondholders, raised state taxes more. Two-thirds to seven-tenths of taxes set by New England legislatures went toward servicing the federal and state debts. And so they raised taxes far beyond the ability of farmers and artisans to pay, particularly when they could do so in neither paper money nor farm produce. The tax burden in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina ranged from three to six times the provincial taxes householders paid before the war; Massachusetts taxpayers paid two percent of their income in taxes before the war, a tenth thereafter.

Rural taxpayers, particularly those far from markets, regularly defaulted. By 1784, Pennsylvania taxpayers had paid 82 percent of taxes assessed from 1778 to 1783. But householders in Philadelphia and surrounding counties paid most of this; western counties owed nine-tenths or more. By 1785, Massachusetts managed to collect half of the taxes assessed in 1780–82, but Worcester and Berkshire counties, epicenters

of the Massachusetts' Regulation, paid just 28 percent. By 1788, state officials had collected three-quarters of the 1782 tax, four-fifths of the 1783 tax, two-thirds of the 1785 tax, but only 16 percent of the 1786 tax. South Carolina had more tax avoidance: in 1787, taxpayers still owed 43 percent of 1783–85 taxes. Rhode Island householders paid more than nine-tenths of the 1782 and 1783 assessments in a timely fashion, but three-quarters of the 1784 taxes remained unpaid in February 1785. Sheriffs collected most of the remainder by May 1786, but only after confiscating and selling farmers' property.⁵⁵

State legislatures made sheriffs, town treasurers, and tax collectors responsible for taxes and liable to imprisonment or confiscation of their own property if they failed to collect them. When farmers could not pay taxes, such laws forced them to lose property or impoverish their neighbors. Faced with this choice, many officials foreclosed delinquents' property. In 1784, even after Hampshire County, Massachusetts collectors had "taken and exposed to sale cattle, and other property belonging to not merely the poorer people, but to substantial farmers," they lost their property, because "the farmer and mechanic [sic]" had no money to buy the goods they put up for sale. A year later the county's sheriff sent £1,152 of the auctioned property of tax collectors to Boston, leading collectors to seize delinquent taxpayer property. Thousands of Pennsylvania farmers, as many as two-thirds in some places, had their property—usually livestock and crops—sold at tax and debt auctions. Peaks occurred during the mid-1780s and then (in smaller numbers) in the late-1790s. In 1785–86 alone, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania officials, on the western border, served 2,000 foreclosure executions; over the 1780s, two-fifths of Westmoreland's householders lost livestock, crops, or (in a tenth of the cases) land. Even in long-settled Berks County, officials served nearly 700 foreclosures. Sheriffs auctioned off farmers' tools, livestock, beds, and chairs, goods families needed to make a living and run a household. In Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, auctioned goods, sold for pennies on the dollar and usually left foreclosed farmers in debt, unable to pay off taxes and private creditors.⁵⁶

To preserve their property, taxpayers engaged in civil disobedience, mobbing tax collectors, closing courts, refusing to bid on farm chattels and land put up for auction to pay taxes or private debts. They knew that the money they paid went directly into the pockets of federal and state bondholders, who had purchased them for a pittance. During the late 1780s and early 1790s, Pennsylvania farmers blocked roads to prevent court action and prevented bidding at debt auctions. When farmers boycotted auctions, Rhode Island authorized town treasurers to seize the goods. Frontier South Carolina planters mobbed tax collectors and surrounded local courts. The Massachusetts Regulation, a violent tax rebellion led by Daniel Shays, required an army to put down. Such resistance sometimes worked, slowing down but not ending austerity measures that ruined farmers and rural artisans. South Carolina released all debtors from prison and mitigated foreclosures by allowing debtors to offer property, accessed by neighbors; if the creditor sued, he had to take the goods if no bidder offered at least three-quarters of its assessed value and such valuation covered the debt. Massachusetts passed some (very inadequate) tax relief after the Regulation, but did not emit new paper money.⁵⁷

Federalist Party tax policies—the Whiskey excise of 1791 and the 1798 Federal Direct Tax—exacerbated farmers' problems. Backcountry farmers thought the Whiskey

tax onerous: aimed at running them out of business, it taxed their only tradeable surplus but protected large distillers. Farmers in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas, Kentucky, and Georgia refused to pay the tax, and—much like their Whig forebears—raised liberty poles and tarred and feathered the tax collectors, raising the specter of a revolution against the Revolution. Their refusal and their protests led to Federal military suppression, and renewed farm foreclosures in Pennsylvania—but not to much tax collection. Even if the level of federal taxes was progressive (as the Direct Tax on land, structures, and slaves was), these burdens added to middling farmers’ plight and added to their already high state taxes, triggering a rebellion in Pennsylvania, readily put down. The Jeffersonians ended both the whiskey and direct taxes once they gained power.⁵⁸

With the revival of immigration—some 200,000 European arrived in the 1780s and 1790s, half from Ireland—commercial farmers could hire laborers at cheap rates, reducing opportunities for the newly dispossessed. New frontiers beckoned: the end of the war, and treaties with and war victories over Indians, culminating in 1794, opened up millions of acres to white settlement. Thousands of families poured into these newly opened lands in Maine, Vermont, western New York and Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Tennessee, backcountry Georgia, and Ohio. Among them were more than half of 980 Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania victims of foreclosure, who left western Pennsylvania, many of them “gone to Kentucky” or the “Indian country”; Prince William County, Virginia farmers and small planters similarly left for Kentucky after the war, some too poor to pay their debts to British merchants. Speculators and large owners, however, controlled much frontier land, including those seized from Loyalists. Many of those who abandoned debts and taxes in older areas could not afford to buy or rent land. Instead, they squatted, refusing to take up leases from such landlords as George Washington. With the Mississippi River often closed to Americans, they struggled to find markets, hoping that they could sell enough whiskey, grain, or other products to raise enough cash to acquire land.⁵⁹

THE FINANCIAL REVOLUTION

In 1775, American merchants and commercial farmers depended on London financiers and Scots tobacco merchants for loans and financial services. While war raged, financiers like Robert Morris could not replicate that financial system. During the early 1780s, the United States had neither a securities market, a commercial banking system (though three banks organized), nor a central bank resembling the Bank of England. The national currency had collapsed, and in 1790, the United States, having collected only \$162,200 in tariffs, faced default on its debts.

By 1800, however, the country had a modern financial system. During the 1790s, Congress chartered a national bank, the Federal government assumed payment of war debts and funded them at par, tax revenues grew to \$10.8 million and paid most government expenditures, and a securities market trading government bonds and a few corporate equities developed in each large American town. Despite a 1792 bank run, stock markets boomed, with equity prices jumping by half from 1791 to 1803. States chartered twenty-nine private banks by 1800, most capitalized at \$100,000 to \$1.2 million, and the bank notes they issued constituted a new money supply. The Bank of the United States, capitalized at \$10 million and designed

as a commercial bank, rather than one that issued mortgages, loaned money to the Federal government, a key attribute of a central bank. In this environment, states chartered forty-four corporations from 1790 to 1792, nearly double the number in the 1780s.⁶⁰

A surge of investment in infrastructure, trade, and human capital followed this financial revolution. The miles of surfaced roads increased 85.5 percent per year between 1794 and 1800, and post roads increased by 26.6 percent annually in the 1790s, speeding both communication and trade. Tonnage in coastal trade jumped 9.6 percent per year from 1789 to 1800. The number of newspapers increased 7.9 percent annually, 1785–1800, the number of patents, 19.5 percent annually, 1792–1800, both suggesting a growing reading and educated public.⁶¹

Alexander Hamilton, who framed this economic system, considered funding the debt crucial to creating a growing economy. It would nationalize finance, putting the debt on a sounder basis, and reduce state taxes (states no longer had to service the debt), eliminating tax revolts; it would provide capital to finance internal improvements, manufactures, and agriculture; it would lower interest rates and raise land prices. The funding policy, adopted by Congress, however, enriched the richest Americans—merchants, manufacturers, and commercial farmers—who held nearly all the debt, while perpetuating the poverty of the middling farmers and craftsmen who headed nearly all of the country's free families. At war's end, hard-pressed farmers owned few of the certificates armies or governments had given them in exchange for crops, livestock, or military service, but had sold them during the war to merchants and rich farmers at a steep discount—receiving between one percent and thirty percent—or had used them to pay taxes. They could not take advantage of the capital gains richer men enjoyed and use the proceeds to improve their farms and income. By the early 1780s, merchants in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New York, and Virginia held most certificates still circulating.⁶²

Once states began to accept certificates for taxes or paid interest on par value, their market value rose, adding to the profits of current holders: New York's certificates increased by a third, when the state government accepted them for land; New Jersey certificates rose to twenty cents per dollar when they paid interest on them. Farmers might buy certificates with crops or livestock, but at a premium over the prices they had received for those they had sold. Risks, however, remained high and sales proved difficult. Markets grew as knowledge of the Federal government's assumption of state debts became known. Speculators rushed South in 1789 and 1790 to buy up securities as cheaply as they could, before the sellers knew about assumption, purchasing \$837,000 of Virginia debts and \$3.51 million of Carolina debts. The final assumption bill exchanged state certificates for three new bonds. The first, worth two-thirds of face value, paid six percent interest, starting at redemption; the second, valued at one-third the value of the original bond, paid interest beginning in 1801; and a third covered back unpaid interest at three percent. The law gave holders (who had paid much less) a huge financial boon.⁶³

Many of the original holders still had their certificates and would benefit by prompt payment but by 1790, a few rich merchants, gentlemen, and professionals owned a preponderance of Federal and state debt. Those with over \$10,000 (\$254,000 in 2011) owned a half to three fifths in Massachusetts (seven percent of the owners), Pennsylvania (nine percent of owners), and Maryland (five percent of owners). Rhode

Island’s federal debt holdings were less concentrated, but nine individuals with more than \$10,000 held two-fifths of it. Five years later, debt holdings remained concentrated. About three of every hundred families—from middling and rich families in every community—had acquired federal bonds. Typical holders had \$571 (\$13,971 in 2011), well beyond the means of most farmers and artisans. The twentieth of owners with \$10,000 or more held nearly two-thirds of the debt. A third of the owners lived in towns and cities, five times their proportion of national population. Seven-tenths of the owners—merchants, traders, gentlemen, professional men, planters—belonged to the new nation’s ruling class. Only a fifth were commercial farmers and yeomen, only a twelfth artisans or urban manufacturers.⁶⁴

THE AMERICAN WAR AND POST-WAR POLITICS

When eighteenth-century Americans wrote about the Revolution, they thought of the “American war,” rather than the events leading up to it: between 1770 and 1783, leading newspapers, pamphlets, and books used “American war” 595 times, but “American Revolution” only 72 times. Nation building required heroes; free Americans reveled in General Washington’s leadership and the exploits of his army and the deprivations they endured. Two of the earliest histories of the Revolution—David Ramsay’s 1789 and Mercy Otis Warren’s 1805 works—emphasize the war years. Seven-tenths of Ramsay’s two volumes and three-quarters of Warren’s three volumes covered the war years.⁶⁵

The memory of the war drove the political conflicts of the 1780s and 1790s. Those pushing for financial change—mostly Federalists and moneyed men—remembered wartime monetary depreciation and vowed to set the new nation’s economy on a stable course. States and the Federal government, they insisted, must pay their debts; only a strong government could collect taxes to pay interest on the government securities they held. South Carolina historian and physician David Ramsay published an appendix about paper money in his *History of the American Revolution*. The depreciation of Continentals, he claimed, impoverished the rich but enriched the poor. “The aged who had retired from . . . active business, to enjoy the fruits of their industry, found their substance melting away to a mere pittance.” At the same time, widows lost their comfortable living, bequeathed to them by their husbands, forced by “the laws of the country . . . to receive a shilling where a pound was her due.” But laborers, never “idle from want of employment” extorted “full value” from their employers; “expending money as fast as they received it, they always got full value.” Debtors could readily discharge what they owed; “a hog or two would pay for a slave; a few cattle for a comfortable house; and a good horse for an improved plantation.” Nor did the “evils of depreciation” end with the war; “the helpless part of the community were legislatively deprived of their property” because of “the legal tender of the depreciated bills of credit.” This tale ignored those driven from their homes because they could not pay their debts, made in inflated (depreciated) money, in the deflated currency of the 1780s and early 1790s.⁶⁶

Men on all sides admired Continental soldiers and understood their deprivations. Ramsay thought the Pennsylvania Line, composed primarily of natives of Ireland, “inferior to none in their discipline, courage, and attachment to the cause of

independence.” Opponents of funding the debt at par went beyond patriotic pieties and demanded redress for those who had suffered during the war by paying current holders interest on their bonds at their current, market price. In 1790, William Manning, a rural Massachusetts farmer and tavern keeper, urged Congress to refuse to pay interest on government debts to current holders based on their par value because they would gain unfair profits at the expense of original holders, who had previously sold them cheaply and now would have to finance interest payments with their taxes. The Revolutionary War had increased deprivation; original holders, particularly veterans, suffered. “Did the poor soldiers,” he insisted, whose government promised to pay them “once in three months” but “waited two or three years for their pay” only to “return home to their needy families with nothing but certificates” from a government that had never fulfilled its promises “act voluntarily in selling their certificates under par? Surely, no.” To be just “to the original creditors” the government must “make restitution and compensation to those who helped us in time of need as soon as we are able” by paying current holders 8 shillings and original holders 12.⁶⁷

That same year, Yale graduate Pelatiah Webster, an ordained minister, Philadelphia merchant, and supporter of the Constitution published “A Plea for the Poor Soldiers.” Although he usually opposed Manning’s policies, Webster used populist rhetoric that closely connected debates over finance to the war. He wrote to “advocate the *rights and claims*” for compensation “of a great and very respectable class of our citizens,” the “*worthy and deserving patriots*” who “*during the war*, when our country was overwhelmed with infinite distress and danger, *rendered their services, supplies and money in its defence*.” But a bankrupt government could not pay these patriots who “therefore, were *obliged to accept* certificates of the balances *due* to them, with promises of interest and payment in future time.” Needing the money, they sold them for a twelfth their face value. Even though they had sold the certificates, the rest of the money, with interest, was still due them “for their *dear and painful earnings* in their country’s cause.” The current owners should receive only the market value of the certificates.⁶⁸

Who were these “most virtuous citizens, who, by their patriotic efforts, services, and supplies, *supported the war, and saved our country?*” Webster placed Continental Army soldiers, mostly poor and dispossessed, foremost among them. No other army had “practiced more spirit, firmness, patience, discipline, fortitude, and zeal, either under the instant pressure of the greatest *hardships and sufferings*, or in the solemn and awful march to *the most dangerous enterprise*; or in the arduous *moments of battle*.” They not only included these soldiers but the “*citizens who supplied them*,” the tens of thousands of families who, under duress, had provisioned the army with grain, vegetables, livestock or horses. Payment to all of them would “satisfy the grateful wishes of all our citizens and to establish our national character of honor and humanity.” Webster thus evoked a large imagined and patriotic community, encompassing most of the free householders of the country, united by war service and sacrifice: soldiers and their widows and children; yeoman farmer and farmer-craftsman families; supporters of the war, along with neutrals and reconciled Loyalists who had provided goods.⁶⁹

Revolutionary War veterans long remembered the suffering they endured and the politics that kept them poor. Decades after the war ended, Continental soldier Joseph

Plumb Martin resented the country's treatment of veterans. As he related in his 1830 memoir, soldiers sold their pay certificates at cheap rates “to procure decent clothing and money sufficient to enable them to pass with decency through the country and to appear something like themselves when they arrived among friends.” In Martin's case, seven years of pay, exchanged for a bond, paid for but one suit and travel expenses to get home. Soldiers had not received their due: “turned adrift like old worn-out horses,” many never learned how to apply for land promised them at enlistment, nor did many get the free Ohio lands promised them. Their allies had lost their battle to pay original bondholders what they deserved. Martin knew that “none cared for them; the country was served . . . , and that was all that was deemed necessary.” Cheated out of the free land in Maine that speculator General Henry Knox had taken from him, Martin remained poor his entire life, reduced to applying for a veteran's pension, reserved for paupers, in 1818. “The country was rigorous in exacting my compliance to *my* engagements,” he concluded, “but equally careless in performing her contract with me, and why so? One reason was she had all the power in her own hands and I had none. Such things ought not to be.”⁷⁰

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NOTES

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CHAPTER EIGHT

CONSOLIDATING A REVOLUTIONARY REPUBLIC



Max M. Edling

American historians have always regarded the years between the signing of the Treaty of Paris in September 1783, which ended the War of Independence, and the framing of the new federal Constitution four years later, as a particularly important period in the nation's history. The peace treaty signaled Britain's acceptance of the bid for independence that the colonies had made on July 4, 1776. Yet to many historians, it was the Constitution, rather than the Treaty of Peace, that secured independence and thereby served as the ending point of the American Revolution. The new nation had faced many difficulties after the conclusion of the war with Britain, and the Constitution was the means to resolve them. This view is typically embraced also by popular authors and commentators who celebrate the achievements of the founding fathers. Most historians are much more critical of the Constitution, however. To them, the framing and adoption of the Constitution meant the destruction of egalitarian and democratic promises introduced by the Revolution.

Both views have impressive pedigrees that can be traced all the way back to the founding generation. Yet the discussion among modern historians owes more to works published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when history was becoming an academic discipline. In 1888, the lawyer turned philosopher and historian, John Fiske, published an essay in which he argued that "the period of five years following the peace of 1783 was the most critical moment in all the history of the American people. The dangers from which we were saved in 1788 were even greater than the dangers from which we were saved in 1865." Although his book is rarely read today, Fiske made a lasting contribution to American historiography by popularizing the term "critical period," first used by John Quincy Adams in his 1787 Harvard valedictory address, in reference to the 1780s. His account of the dangers of the critical period also subsequently made their way into monographs and textbooks that shaped perceptions of the period.¹

To Fiske, the core problem facing the new nation was its dysfunctional central government that was unable to meet challenges to American sovereignty and interests. But whereas it was a major problem that Congress was weak and the union fragile, it was hardly a surprise. In the aftermath of independence, most Americans still identified with their own states rather than with the United States. Without a common

sense of nationality, there was no popular basis for a movement to firm up the union and build a stronger national government. In fact, the thirteen states had only come together to defend their independence against Britain. Once that conflict was resolved, the natural tendency was for their union to disintegrate into its foundational elements, the states. At the same time, the states shared a number of concerns that served like a centripetal force to counterbalance the centrifugal tendency to disintegration.

Perhaps the most fundamental reason to stay united was that the United States was recognized as one nation, rather than thirteen republics, by other sovereign states. That the center of this nation was weak was evident already in the peace treaty that created it. Several passages of the treaty spoke not of what the United States would do as a signatory, but of what Congress would “earnestly recommend” “the legislatures of the respective states” to do. Although foreign powers often doubted the United States’ ability to live up to treaty obligations, in the context of the law of nations, the American union was one nation. Another incitement to continued union lay in the western reaches of the nation. Several of the states had ceded territorial claims west of the Appalachian Mountains to Congress, creating a vast public domain north of the Ohio River that was administered by Congress, not the states. When the Constitutional convention met, this was a new development, but there was widespread expectation that the region would absorb thousands of settlers from the thirteen states and from Europe in years to come. Finally, the struggle for independence had left a legacy of shared obligations in the form of a large foreign and domestic debt contracted by Congress in the name of the United States. Defaulting on these debt obligations would cause moral as well as economic and political problems. Quite apart from these tangible causes for continued union, there was also reason to think that the states would be more successful in defending and promoting their interests both in North America and on the Atlantic Ocean as a federal union than they would be as thirteen separate republics.²

But if there were good reason for the states to continue in the union, their Articles of Confederation had not established a central government with sufficient strength to manage their common concerns. In a list often repeated since, Fiske identified a number of areas where Congress could not fulfill international obligations or stand up for American interests: Congress could not enforce international treaties, principally the peace treaty; it could not force the British to abandon military posts on United States soil held contrary to treaty; it could not adopt countermeasures against Britain’s discrimination against American shipping or Spain’s closure of the Mississippi River to American traders; it could not impose a common navigation act on the states; it could not prevent conflicts between the states over inter-state commerce (among other incidents, Fiske claimed that New York’s customs duties deliberately discriminated against New Jersey and Connecticut traders) and territorial boundaries (Connecticut and Pennsylvania clashed over the Wyoming Valley, New York and New Hampshire over the Green Mountains); it could not service its foreign debt or secure new loans on good terms; it could not retaliate against Barbary depredations on American trade in the Mediterranean; it could not secure the loyalty of citizens in Kentucky and New England, who contemplated secession, etc., etc.

In Fiske’s account, the Philadelphia convention came together to address these challenges, and in the absence of a popular movement for reform of the Union and the national government, he naturally came to stress the role of influential statesmen rather than the people out of doors in bringing about reform. Fiske called the Constitution

the “Iliad, or Parthenon, or Fifth Symphony, of statesmanship,” revealing not only his admiration for the work of the founders, but his belief that they were selfless politicians hoping to promote the common good. Although Fiske’s narrative ended with the inauguration of George Washington as first president in April 1789, the implication of his work was that the new federal government under Washington’s lead defused the dangers of the critical period. The Constitution thereby ensured that the national independence that was declared in name in 1776 became a reality in 1789.³

Fiske wrote his essay a century after the founding and two decades after the Civil War, at a time when sectional conflict and international weakness had an immediacy now long lost. Neither continued union nor international great power status was taken for granted by Fiske, and the consequences of disunion were very real to him. In a passage grounded in equal measures in his evolutionary theory of history and his triumphant Anglo-Saxonism, Fiske wrote that the fortunate outcome of the “critical period” had determined that “the continent of North America should be dominated by a single powerful and pacific federal nation instead of being parcelled out among forty or fifty small communities, wasting their strength and lowering their moral tone by perpetual warfare, like the states of ancient Greece, or by perpetual preparation for warfare, like the nations of modern Europe.”⁴

A quarter-century after the publication of Fiske’s essay, there appeared a work in many ways its inversion, which has ever since exercised enormous influence on historians’ understanding of the founding. Where Fiske saw the 1780s as a period of inter-state and international rivalries, Charles Beard’s *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* concentrated on domestic struggles between social groups representing antagonistic interests. To Beard and his followers, independence was always a non-problem, and the fears over disunion and international depredations so often raised by the founding generation were no more than a ruse. The crucial question at the heart of the founding was not whether or not the United States would remain independent, but the sort of society it would become. The founding was a struggle over the distribution of scarce resources, and the Constitution was the means by which one class gained control over the central government to further its own material interests.

Whereas Fiske’s approach downplayed the opposition to the Constitution—he dismissed Antifederalism as “purely a policy of negation and obstruction,” for example—Beard argued that the Constitution was not adopted by the American people, but by an interested segment of the population: “Broadly speaking, the division of the voters over the document was along economic lines. The merchants, manufacturers, private creditors, and holders of public securities loomed large among the advocates of the new system, while the opposition came chiefly from the small farmers behind the seaboard, especially from the men who, in earlier years, had demanded paper money and other apparatus for easing the strain of their debts.”⁵

It followed from Beard’s analysis of the struggle over ratification that he approached the idea of a critical period with considerable skepticism. “When it is remembered that most of our history has been written by Federalists, it will become apparent that great care should be taken in accepting, without reserve, the gloomy picture of the social conditions prevailing under the Articles of Confederation.” In fact, the critical period was in little more than “a phantom of the imagination.” Although he accepted that some socio-economic groups, essentially those who supported the Constitution, suffered in the 1780s, Beard ventured the guess that the country as a whole “was

in many respects already recovering order and prosperity even under the despised Articles of Confederation.”⁶

Despite his reputation as an iconoclast, Beard’s analysis of the founding was in fact always restrained. A much more uncompromising attitude was adopted by Merrill Jensen, a historian thirty years Beard’s junior who has also been extremely influential among his peers. Not only did Jensen claim that the 1780s was a period of “extraordinary economic growth,” he also made explicit the struggle over democracy that was only implicit in Beard’s work. To Jensen, the revolutionary era was dominated by a struggle between “radicals” and “conservatives,” which followed on “the democratization of the American society by the destruction of the coercive authority of Great Britain and the establishment of actual local self-government within the separate states under the Articles of Confederation.” Jensen’s radicals were democrats and supporters of state sovereignty, while his conservatives were aristocrats and nationalists. Whereas the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation were the institutional manifestations of radical ideals, the Constitution was the work of the conservatives. The Federalists, said Jensen, “engineered a conservative counter-revolution and erected a nationalistic government whose purpose was, in part, to thwart the will of ‘the people’ in whose name they acted.” The Constitution was nothing short of “the culmination of an anti-democratic crusade.”⁷

For most of the twentieth century, the tradition established by Beard and Jensen has dominated scholarship on the creation of the Constitution. The founding has been interpreted as a struggle between social classes over issues arising primarily within, rather than outside, the United States. But in recent years there has been a renewed interest in the twinned questions of federalism and international relations that featured so prominently in Fiske’s account of the “critical period.” Such “internationalist” interpretations reflect a wider international turn in the profession that has made historians analyze the many ways in which separate national histories are connected to, or entangled with, one another. Peter Onuf and David Armitage have written about the international and global history of the Declaration of Independence. David Golove and Daniel Hulsebosch have interpreted the Constitution as “a fundamentally international document:” not a counter-revolutionary negation of the promise of the Declaration, but a continuation of its attempt to secure international recognition of the fledgling United States. Robbie Totten has argued that the Constitution was the solution to a two-sided diplomatic crisis of how to work out the relationship between the thirteen new American state-republics, on the one hand, and their collective relationship to foreign powers, on the other hand. Leonard Sadosky has pointed to the importance of working out the new nation’s relationship not only with European states and empires, but also with American Indian nations in order to secure the promises of independence.⁸

Drawing on these and other works, this chapter interprets the Constitution as but the last of several attempts to reform the Articles of Confederation to make Congress better equipped to deal with foreign affairs, the administration of the western lands, and the management of the public debt. It continues beyond ratification because the uses to which the Constitution was put by the first federal Congress provides important insight into why it was first conceived and the benchmark against which its relative success or failure must be assessed. This chapter deliberately avoids the question of ulterior motives and hidden class agendas to establish a straightforward

account of the founding as a process that involved discrete stages of problem identification and agenda setting, followed by institutional reform, policy enactment, and implementation.

I

The United States willed itself into existence with a bold Declaration of Independence. Although this declaration opened with the sufferings of “one people” at the hands of a despotic monarch, it ended with the dissolution of the American people into thirteen “Free and Independent States,” each possessing “the full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.” Significantly, it was signed not on behalf of the American people but by “the Representatives of the united States of America.” In addition to presenting the United States as a nation and as thirteen states, the Declaration also signaled the intention of the “United Colonies” to confederate. In the name of their constituents, the signers “mutually pledge[d] to each other” their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor. This foundational text thus presents no less than three ways to view the United States: as a nation among nations; as thirteen sovereign states; and as a union. In fact, the new polity was all of these, and throughout the nation’s early history these distinct identities would often coexist in tension and conflict.⁹

Declaring independence was but one step in a larger state-building process that aimed to turn the colonies into sovereign state-republics. Properly speaking, it was not even the first step. Separation from Britain was certainly a necessity, but so was writing republican state constitutions, establishing a confederation among the former colonies, and entering into a military alliance with Britain’s enemies. To the members of Congress who pushed for independence, it seemed that the proper order was first to establish republican governments in every colony, second to confederate, third to declare the confederation independent, and finally to enter into treaties and alliances. But the pressure of events jumbled the process. A month before the Declaration was issued, political insider John Adams confessed that it was impossible to “proceed systematically.” “We shall be obliged to declare ourselves independent States before We confederate, and indeed before all the Colonies have established their Governments. It is now pretty clear, that all these Measures will follow one another in rapid Succession, and it may not perhaps be of much Importance, which is done first.”¹⁰

Seen as a step in a state-building process, the origin of the federal union in external security concerns becomes evident. A Congressional committee put it well when it remarked in 1781 that “America became a Confederate Republic to crush the pr[esent] & future foes of her Independence.” Many years later, when he reflected on the origins of the Constitution, James Madison noted that throughout history “feeble communities, independent of each other, have resorted to Union . . . for the common safety against powerful neighbors, and for the preservation of peace and justice among themselves.” Madison’s last words point to the need to widen the concept of international security to also include the relationship among the American state-republics. As sovereign states, they were potential competitors and enemies of one another, and, as David Hendrickson has so admirably explained, the federal union was in part a “peace pact” between the new states, intended to replace conflict and war with negotiation and arbitration in Congress.¹¹

But confederation also served to create unity against foreign powers. Experience taught that republics were by nature weak and unstable political organizations. Typically small in size, republics were polities where factions warred for political influence and where there was rapid turnover of government officials. In addition, the citizens jealously guarded against the concentration of power in the hands of the rulers. Although these features made the republic more likely to preserve popular liberty, it also meant that it was less capable of energetic action than monarchies, systems of government that concentrated political power in one person. For this reason, they were prone to be “destroyed by foreign force.” Americans of the founding generation found an able analyst of the republic’s security concerns in the writings of Montesquieu. The French thinker also offered the institutional solution to the precarious situation of small republics in a hostile world of predatory monarchies. In a chapter that Alexander Hamilton later quoted at length in *The Federalist*, Montesquieu explained that confederation offered a way to combine liberty with energetic government, or “all the internal advantages of republican government” with “the external force of a monarch.”¹²

The American state-republics’ first attempt at confederation was drafted in 1777 and ratified in 1781. The Articles of Confederation tied the thirteen states “into a firm league of friendship with each other, for their common defence, the security of their Liberties, and their mutual and general welfare.” It also bound them “to assist each other, against all force offered to, or attacks made upon them, on account of religion, sovereignty, trade, or any pretence whatever.” The primacy of international relations and war-making to the Confederation is clearly evident in the document. Articles VI and IX transferred the power of making war and peace, sending and receiving ambassadors, and entering into treaties and alliances—powers which the Declaration of Independence had placed in the individual state-republics—from the state governments to “the united states in congress assembled.” Congress was also invested with the power to arbitrate interstate conflicts among the members of the Union, thus pointing to the “peace pact” dimension of the Confederation; to facilitate their commercial intercourse by determining the value of coins and fixing weights and measures; and to regulate member states’ relations with American Indian nations.¹³

In effect, the Articles institutionalized a division of labor between the states in their collective capacity “in congress assembled,” and in their individual capacity as state-republics. In their latter role, the state governments retained what was then known as “internal police powers,” a very broad field of government activity that included the regulation of the economy and the health, morals, and general welfare of the population. In their former role, the states dealt with foreign affairs, including war and Indian matters, and with relations among the member states. It should be noted that the Articles did not set up the institutions of a national government, however. Congress should be understood not as a legislature, but as a “plural executive” or a “deliberating executive assembly” formed by state delegations. It provided a forum in which the states could agree on common measures and coordinate their actions. But there were neither executive departments nor field agencies answering to Congress, nor was there a Continental court structure. Under the Articles, the state governments were meant to serve as the administrative agents of the Union.¹⁴

The distinction between internal and international affairs was well established in the late eighteenth century. John Locke distinguished between “executive” and “federative”

power, where the latter referred to “the management of security and interest of the public without, with all those that it may receive benefit and damages from” and included “the Power over War and Peace, Leagues and Alliances, and all the Transactions with all Persons and Communities without the Commonwealth.” Montesquieu spoke instead of two forms of executive power, pertaining to “the things depending on civil rights” and to “the things depending on the rights of nations,” respectively. By means of the latter, Montesquieu wrote, the magistrate “makes peace or war, sends or receives embassies, establishes security, and prevents invasions.” That the distinction was known outside the chambers of learned political theorists is demonstrated by the Essex Result of 1778, which explained that “[t]he executive power is sometimes divided into the external executive, and internal executive. The former comprehends war, peace, and the sending and receiving ambassadors, and whatever concerns the transactions of the state with any other independent states. The confederation of the United States hath lopped off this branch of the executive, and placed it in Congress.”¹⁵

Other contemporary statements bear out the claim of the Essex townsmen that the internal-external distinction had been applied in the federal union of the United States. In his *Thoughts on Government* (1776), Adams argued that Congress’s “authority should sacredly be confined to these cases, namely, war, trade, disputes between colony and colony, the post-office, and the unappropriated lands of the crown.” At the other end of the political spectrum, Carter Braxton felt that Congress “should have power to adjust disputes between colonies, regulate the affairs of trade, war, peace, alliances, &c. but they should by no means have authority to interfere with the internal police or domestic concerns of any Colony.” Even an early states’ rights ideologue such as Thomas Burke held that “the United States ought to be as One Sovereign with respect to foreign Powers, in all things that relate to War or when the States have one Common Interest.” Such a division of labor required no giant leap of the political imagination. The Articles of Confederation did no more than institutionalize a political order that the revolutionaries claimed had always existed in the British Empire. As John Murrin has pointed out, the main duties of Congress—creating and commanding the army and navy; managing diplomatic relations; printing money; issuing requisitions on the states; and administering the Post Office—all “belonged to the Crown before 1774.” In contrast, “Congress did not pass laws, levy taxes, or regulate trade—functions that Parliament had claimed within the empire.” Under the Articles, Congress did not assume the powers of Parliament, but of the king and council.¹⁶

Recognition of the internal-external distinction, and of the wisdom of investing Congress with external executive powers, did not mean that this grant of power was unproblematic. Many contemporaries believed that Congress should have the power to regulate trade, for instance, yet Congress held no such power under the Articles. There was no complete agreement on exactly where the external-internal division ran, and no sooner had the ink on the parchment dried than attempts to amend the Articles by authorizing Congress to regulate commerce started. But it would not be until the acceptance of the Constitution that such a right was finally given to the national government. Opposition to the expansion of Congress’s power stemmed from an awareness that the exercise of external powers could have significant consequences to the internal development in the states. What made things worse was

the fact that the exercise of such powers were likely to have different effects in different states. The Jay–Gardoqui negotiations over navigation of the Mississippi River, for instance, pointed to the existence of different foreign policy interests within the Union, which could be traced back to variations in socioeconomic conditions between the member states.

In the years 1778 and 1779, when the states ratified the Articles of Confederation, they offered no less than one hundred proposals to amend the Articles. They reveal that the founding generation saw national politics as a balancing act between the need for union on the one hand, and concern for particular state interests on the other. When Congress sent the Articles to the states for ratification, it alluded to the potential conflict between union and state interests. It presented the United States not as a nation locked in a common struggle for national existence, but as “a continent divided into so many sovereign and independent communities,” differing in “habits, produce, commerce, and internal police.” In principle, the states should not delegate powers to Congress that could hurt their interests, and some commentators felt that too much power had already been granted to the national government. Thus one amendment proposal complained that the Articles contained “matters highly important and interesting to the future people of this state, and involving what may very materially affect the internal interests and sovereign independence thereof,” but which were “not immediately essential to the success of the present war.”¹⁷

On the basis of this discussion of the Articles of Confederation, it is possible to summarize the original concept of the American federal union. Its first incarnation was an institutional solution to security concerns, which allowed thirteen weak state-republics to join together in the defense of their independence and interests. It invested powers over war and international affairs in a congress of states, but the state governments retained their internal police powers. Despite the fact that Congress was left in charge with very extensive duties, the Articles of Confederation created little in the way of national governmental institutions. Nor did the Articles create a sovereign American people. It provided no method to collect the popular will outside the thirteen states. Hence, although the United States became a “nation” in the sense of a sovereign state recognized by the law of nations, it was never a “nation” in the sense of a national community. In a striking simile, Murrin described the federal government as “a roof without walls,” a national government without a national constituency. Although this description is accurate enough, contemporary iconographers well knew that the federal roof was not propped up by the American people, but by the thirteen pillars of the states. The absence of any sense of an American people meant that there could be no national will separate from the interests of the member states. Instead, the common good of the Union was understood to be the sum total of the state interests represented in Congress.¹⁸

To an extent not always appreciated, most of the elements in the original understanding of the federal union survived the transition from the Articles of Confederation to the Constitution. The renewed pact of union that evolved out of the deliberations of the Philadelphia Convention did not significantly extend the reach or tasks of the national government. Nor did it challenge the idea that the Union was in essence an instrument to further the interests of the states. The Constitution was first and foremost a reform of the organization of the federal union, not of its rationale or aims.

II

Historians have long been used to approaching the Constitutional Convention through the eyes of James Madison, who has often been called the father of the Constitution. But Madison's influence on the Constitution is now being reassessed. To begin with, it is clear that the finished document fell considerably short of his expectations. It has also been questioned whether Madison was really representative of the reform movement as a whole. Nonetheless, his careful and perceptive analysis of the ills of the federal union remain essential to an understanding of precisely what the Constitutional Convention set out to do.¹⁹

In the months leading up to the meeting in Philadelphia, Madison wrote two memoranda analyzing the political evils that plagued the United States. Although these texts are rightly famous, the most striking fact about them is rarely mentioned: Madison prepared for the convention not by analyzing democracies or republics or even constitutions, but by analyzing confederations. His "Notes on Ancient and Modern Confederacies" was not concerned so much with domestic politics or the excesses of democracy, as with the international and internal relations of past and present unions. He commented extensively on the failure of historical and contemporary confederations to effectively withstand foreign powers and maintain peace and concord among member states. When he turned to an enumeration of the "Vices of the Political System of the United States," only four out of twelve vices referred to the internal affairs of the states. The list instead began with the failure of the states to comply with Congressional requisitions. It continued with state encroachments on federal authority; violations of treaties and the law of nations; encroachments by the states on one another's rights; disagreement over commercial regulations and fiscal measures; and the failure to protect the member states from domestic unrest.²⁰

Madison's privileging of international over domestic politics as the proper concern of the national government continued in the Constitutional Convention. In a major speech drawing on his "Vices" memorandum, vicious state legislation had been reduced to but one of eight afflictions of the Union. At this point, Madison also felt pressured to justify the inclusion of evils "which prevail within the states individually" in a discussion of the ills of the Union, thereby signaling an awareness that he embraced a more expansive reform agenda than most other delegates to the Convention. The reason, he said, was that wrongful state action "indirectly affect the whole; and there is great reason to believe the pressure of them had a full share in the motives which produced the present Convention."²¹

The most careful Madison scholars now point to the Virginian's dual agenda to perpetuate the Union, but also to redeem the tarnished reputation of republican government by restoring respect for private rights. Before the Convention, Madison had reached the conclusion that neither of these goals could be achieved unless the national government was given the right to veto state legislation. After a promising start, the other delegates refused to go along with such blatant interference in the internal affairs of the states. This failure caused considerable disappointment and made Madison fear that the new Constitution would "neither effectively answer its national object nor prevent local mischiefs which every where disgusts against the state governments." A few weeks after the Convention had adjourned, he wrote Thomas Jefferson that more than anything else it was the "mutability of the laws of the States" that had provided

the impulse for constitutional change. A reform “which does not make provision for individual rights, must be materially defective,” he concluded.²²

The first part of Madison’s agenda met with a more receptive audience in the Constitutional Convention, however. His letter to Jefferson made clear that the Constitution aimed not to correct the internal legislation of the states, but to secure “the objects of the Union.” But here Madison becomes a less helpful guide to the proceeding of the Convention, as he was remarkably reticent about precisely what the objects of the Union were. His letter to Jefferson spoke only of the Convention’s intent “to draw a line of demarcation which would give to the General Government every power requisite for general purposes, and leave to the States every power which might be most beneficially administered by them.” According to a leading biographer, however, Madison’s conception of the proper sphere of the national government was “basically *conventional*.” In fact, the main reason neither Madison nor anyone else in Philadelphia spent much time outlining the purposes of union, or the role of the national government in it, was that the Convention did not provide for the expansion of national government power, but for a structural reorganization of the Union that would allow for their effective use. Madison’s later assertion in *The Federalist*—“if the new Constitution be examined with accuracy and candour, it will be found that the change which it proposes, consists much less in the addition of *new powers* to the Union, than in the invigoration of its *original powers*”—remains perhaps the best available characterization of the reform.²³

Despite the absence of a sustained debate on the objects of the Union, the deliberations of the Constitutional Convention allow at least a glimpse of what the delegates hoped from the Constitution. The Convention opened with the presentation of the so-called Virginia plan. Boldly declaring that the Articles of Confederation be scrapped in favor of a tripartite national government made up of a bicameral legislative assembly, an executive, and a judiciary, it also borrowed the words of the Articles’ preamble to confirm that the object of the Union nonetheless remained the “common defense, security of liberty, and general welfare” of the states. In an accompanying speech, Virginia’s governor, Edmund Randolph, explained that the central government “ought to secure 1. against foreign invasions: 2. against dissensions between the members of the Union, or sedition in particular states: 3. to p[ro]cure to the several States various blessings, of which an isolated situation was i[n]capable: 4. To be able to defend itself against incroachments: & 5. to be paramount to the state constitutions.” Although the third point may sound expansive, Randolph had quite specific blessings in mind. He spoke of “a productive impost,” “counteraction of the commercial regulations of other nations,” and the ability to increase American commerce “ad libitum.” The Virginia plan drew severe criticism from the so-called small-state delegates, who opposed the Virginians’ call for proportional representation in both houses of the legislature. But they had no problem with Randolph’s enumeration of the objects of the Union. Roger Sherman, one of the plan’s strongest opponents, defined “the objects of the Union” in a fashion quite similar to Randolph’s as: “1. defence agst. foreign danger. 2. agst internal disputes & a resort to force. 3. Treaties with foreign nations 4 regulating foreign commerce, and drawing revenue from it. These and perhaps a few lesser objects alone rendered a Confederation of the States necessary.”²⁴

The Philadelphia Convention saw only one early attempt to provide a detailed list of the powers of the new national government. The so-called Pinckney plan

operated with a highly conventional understanding of the proper reach of the national government. It repeated the battery of powers already lodged in Congress by the Articles of Confederation and added to these the right to levy taxes, including duties on imports and exports, and to regulate interstate and international trade. Although at first ignored, Charles Pinckney's enumeration of national government powers was later used by the Constitutional Convention's Committee of Detail and thereby made its way into the finished Constitution. A comparison of the powers invested in the national government by the Constitution and by the Articles of Confederation bears out Madison's assertion that the former did not expand the powers granted by the latter. The only major additional power given to Congress was the right to regulate commerce. But that power, Madison said, "seems to be an addition which few oppose, and from which no apprehensions are entertained. The powers relating to war and peace, armies and fleets, treaties and finance, with the other more considerable powers, are all vested in the existing Congress by the articles of Confederation. The proposed change does not enlarge these powers; it only substitutes a more effectual mode of administering them."²⁵

Later comments further confirm that the national government was designed to manage international matters, rather than domestic affairs, also under the Constitution. In *The Federalist*, Hamilton defined the "principal purpose" of the Union to be "[t]he common defence of the members—the preservation of the public peace as well against internal convulsions as external attacks—the regulation of commerce with other nations and between the States—the superintendence of our intercourse, political and commercial, with foreign nations." By the mid-1790s, Madison no longer claimed that the Constitution had originated in disgust over state legislation, but in anger over Britain's commercial discrimination, and that it "had been established with the known view of redressing them." In the election year of 1800, Jefferson claimed "the true theory of our Constitution" to be that "the states are independent as to every thing within themselves, & united as to every thing respecting foreign nations." His first annual message to Congress repeated the idea that the federal government was "charged with the external and mutual relations only of these States," whereas the state governments had "principal care of our persons, our property, and our reputation, constituting the great field of human concerns." A decade later he wrote a foreign correspondent that the United States remained "amalgamated into one as to their foreign concerns, but single and independent as to their internal administration."²⁶

III

To the history of the evolution of the federal union, the significance of the Constitution does not lie in the expansion of central government powers, but in the creation of an administratively autonomous central government apparatus. The Articles of Confederation had been written to allow the states to coordinate their struggle for independence. Very soon it became apparent that the construction of the federal union did not allow Congress to play this part efficiently. Considering the colonies' inexperience in managing foreign and imperial affairs, this is hardly surprising. "Prior to the Revolution," John Jay later remarked, international affairs "were managed for us and not by us." "War and peace, alliances, and treaties, and commerce, and navigations, were conducted without our advice or control." When the new states entered into

their confederation, they were wary of investing too much power in a distant central government, even one governed by state delegations. The Articles therefore made sure to give the states the ability to control the actions of Congress. Under the Articles, Congress could declare and conduct war, but not recruit or supply an army; it could borrow money, but not provide for its repayment; it could enter into treaties with foreign powers, but not prevent its own citizens from violating international agreements. On paper, Congress's powers were formidable. In reality they were rendered feeble because their exercise depended on the cooperation of the states. When such cooperation was not forthcoming, the national government came to a standstill.²⁷

It took no great political genius to pinpoint where the problem lay. Although the confederation articles invested sufficient powers in Congress "to answer the ends of our union," Noah Webster noted in 1785, there was "no method of enforcing [Congress's] resolutions." The Articles provided Congress with no sanction or means of coercion to ensure that state governments actually did what Congress directed them to do. Instead, the Union rested on voluntary compliance. The Constitutional Convention set out to rectify this flaw and the Virginia plan offered no less than three institutional solutions to the problem of state delinquency.²⁸

The first of these was Madison's national veto of state legislation, which the Convention turned down. The second was military coercion. According to the Virginia plan, the national assembly would have the right "to call forth the force of the Union against any number of the Union failing to fulfill its duty under the articles thereof." But despite the fact that the Constitution eventually gave Congress the power to call out the militia "to execute the Laws of the Union," the delegates immediately saw that coercion of the states could never work as a method for the administration of government. They came to realize that "punishment could not [in the nature of things be executed] on the States collectively, and therefore that such a Govt. was necessary as could directly operate on individuals, and would punish those only whose guilt required it." Madison, too, soon came round to this conclusion. The "more he reflected on the use of force," he said, "the more he doubted the practicability, the justice and the efficacy of it when applied to people collectively and not individually." In a letter to Jefferson he wrote that coercion of delinquent states resembled "much more a civil war, than the administration of a regular government."²⁹

The rejection of coercion pointed to the third solution to the problem of state cooperation. Preconvention proposals had been in agreement that the national government could only operate efficiently if it possessed the power to both make and administer the law. By setting up a separate national government that could act directly on the people, it would be possible to bypass the states altogether in the administration of national affairs. The Virginia plan therefore called for the creation of a tripartite national government "consisting of a *Supreme* Legislative, Executive & Judiciary."³⁰

When the Philadelphia Convention first assembled, much of this remained vague. Thinking through the problems of the American Union in the spring of 1787, Madison confessed to "have scarcely ventured as yet to form my own opinion either of the manner in which [the executive] ought to be constituted or of the authorities with which it ought to be clothed." With the exception of the office of the President, this vagueness remained in the Constitution. It would be left to the first federal Congress to give form to the executive departments and the judiciary. But if the details remained undefined, the principle was clear. The new national government

had to possess not only a legislative branch but also an executive and a judiciary, for a government “without a proper Executive & Judiciary would be a mere trunk of a body without arms or legs to act or move.”³¹

The outcome of the deliberations of the Constitutional Convention was therefore the establishment of a separate national government parallel to the already existing state governments. In terms of the administration of government, the new national government was autonomous from the state governments. However it was not, nor was it ever intended to be, autonomous from the state governments when it came to the formulation of national government policy. Despite the preamble’s talk of “We, the People of the United States,” the Constitution did not create an American people any more than the Articles of Confederation had. The national government therefore remained a national government without a national constituency. Historians have been correct in pointing to the importance of popular sovereignty in rendering the Constitution legitimate. But if the federal government’s authority rested on the fiction of a grant of power from the people to the government, the popular will nonetheless continued to be channeled through the states also under the Constitution. In the case of the Senate this was made explicit. But in the House of Representatives, too, seats were divided between the states. Had there not been a strong sense that the United States consisted not only of thirteen peoples, but also of thirteen peoples with distinct interests, there would have been no bickering over the distribution of votes between the states and the sections. And there would have been no need for the three-fifths compromise that gave the Southern states votes on the basis of both their free and their enslaved populations.³²

Rather than replacing the states with a national government, the Constitutional Convention confirmed that the principal purpose of the federal union was to be the defense and promotion of the member states’ well-being. It did so in several ways. Most obviously, the Constitution provided for the representation of the states in the Senate. It also protected specific state interests from interference from the national government. Less obvious, but just as important, was the sanction that the deliberations gave to a certain style of politics centered on the promotion of state interests. The famous compromises in the Convention heralded the tradition of sectional compromise that would become such a prominent feature of national politics in the antebellum era. Fundamentally, under the Constitution the federal union remained what it had been under the Articles of Confederation: a union of state-republics. The national government set up by the Constitution was not intended to realize a national will against the wishes of the state governments. Rather, the federal government was the creature of the states and a powerful tool for the realization of their interests.³³

IV

The reform of the union took place in the eleventh hour. After a year-long struggle over ratification, the Constitution was adopted and elections held to a new Congress that would convene in early March 1789. To this Congress was left the task of turning the paragraphs of the Constitution into the institutions of the new government. Only a few months after the first Congress met in early March 1789, processes began to unravel that would culminate in the turmoil of the French Revolution. This social and political upheaval soon spilled over in international wars of great magnitude and global



Figure 8.1 This 1787 print from Connecticut urging ratification of the Constitution depicts the state as a wagon saddled with debts and depreciated paper money. Federalist supporters of the Constitution pull the state towards the rising sun, while Anti-Federalists pull towards storm clouds and fire. The Constitution allowed the national government to tax and borrow, making possible Alexander Hamilton’s financial system. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppmsca-17522.

scope that would last for close to a quarter-century. The European wars came to impose severe strains also on the United States. Had the states not confirmed their intent to remain in union, and had they not transferred essential powers to a new central government, it is more than likely that the bands of union would have snapped.³⁴

Initially the Wars of the French Revolution proved a boon to the American economy. United States neutrality allowed the nation’s merchant to engross more and more of the Atlantic trade, and the war created rising demand for American agricultural products. The federal government, too, benefitted from the growing volume of trade, which translated into increasing income from customs duties, its major source of income. But the European war also represented threats that made the dangers of the critical period appear almost harmless. The major belligerents Britain and France both thought the Atlantic decisive to the war’s outcome, and both nations interfered with American trade on repeated occasions in the period 1792 to 1815. International trade, in many ways the lifeblood of the American economy, therefore threatened to drag the United States into the war, something that eventually happened in the summer of 1812. Having to steer a neutral course through

global war meant that the federal government was not free to pursue a domestically formulated agenda. Instead, for the first quarter-century of its existence, the new government had to respond to events and processes that originated outside the nation's borders and over which it had next to no control.³⁵

Assessing the federal government's record in the troubled decade after the meeting of the first federal Congress, it is helpful to start with the related policy areas of foreign affairs, the management of the western lands, and payments on the public debt, all of which had caused difficulties in the 1780s. Despite the tensions of the European war, the government's record in all these fields had improved considerably a few years after the calling of the first Congress. In President Washington's seventh annual message, from December 1795, he told the members of Congress that "I have never met you at any period, when more than at present, the situation of our public affairs has afforded just cause for mutual congratulations." With the benefit of hindsight it is clear that this moment was only the calm before the storm. Later in the decade, Washington's Federalist party would have to deal with domestic and international crises growing out of deteriorating relations with revolutionary France. Nevertheless, there was reason to present 1795 as a year when the government had scored some remarkable successes and as a moment to take stock of what Congress had achieved since 1789.³⁶

Washington began by drawing attention to the pacification of the Indians in the Ohio country and to the recently concluded Treaty of Greenville. To the tribes in the Northwestern territory, and indeed to North American Indians in general, the army's victory at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, and the subsequent treaty signed at Greenville, was the opening stages of a tragedy. To the United States, on the other hand, it meant that one of the most serious impediments to western expansion—an expansion pursued as eagerly by Federalists as by their Republican opponents, although by different means and driven by different visions of the territory's future—had been removed. In addition to success in the Ohio country, where the government had concentrated its resources, in 1795 peace had also been secured with the powerful Indian nations in the Southwest.

The pacification of the Native Americans opened the door for the expansion of Euroamerican settlements in the vast Northwest Territory. In the train of the soldiers came federal surveyors and land offices followed by settlers. The Treaty of Greenville forced the door open but it was only one of many Native American land cessions in the period. In the decade from 1791 to 1800, the Senate ratified eleven treaties with Indian nations, seven of which involved the alienation of land. The United States thereby acquired 18,500 square miles in return for payments of \$200,000. At a price of less than two cents an acre, this was considerably below what white settlers had to pay for public land. Once the Jeffersonians came to power, the federal government would intensify the transfer of land from Native Americans to the United States. The period 1801 to 1810 saw the government acquire 153,400 square miles by means of 33 land sessions, an area more than twice the size of New England. Always frugal, Jefferson and Madison paid no more than \$400,000 for this land, or considerably less than half a cent per acre. Transferring sovereignty of the land to the federal government was the first step toward peopling the national domain with Euroamericans. It was followed by the sale of public lands to white settlers. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, 3.2 million acres were sold by the government, much more would be sold in ensuing decades. In 1790, there were 74,000 Euroamericans living in Kentucky and 36,000 in Tennessee. Ten years later, the population had almost tripled.

By 1800, an additional 45,000 settlers resided in Ohio and another 6,000 in Indiana. Of the total population growth recorded in the United States between 1790 and 1800, a full 20 percent took place in the region west of the mountains.³⁷

Of no less importance to the future development of the trans-Appalachian West was the conclusion of negotiations between the United States and the European powers with colonial possessions in North America. From the court of Madrid, Washington reported, news had arrived that the American envoy, Thomas Pinckney, was about to sign a treaty “securing amicably, very essential interests of the United States.” Although the existence of a new treaty with Britain had been widely known for months, the President also took the opportunity to disclose officially that John Jay had concluded “a Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation” with the former mother country. Pinckney’s Treaty re-opened the Mississippi River to American trade, thereby bringing to an end a long-standing conflict between the United States and Spain that began in 1784 when the river was closed and providing for the realization of the full economic potential of the West. Jay’s Treaty was of no less importance to the future of the West, as Britain at last agreed to evacuate strategic military posts it had occupied in breach of the 1783 peace treaty. Because these posts controlled the fur trade and the transport routes in the Old Northwest, they held the key to the pacification of the Indian nations living there. Without American possession of the posts, the Treaty of Greenville would have been little more than a dead letter. “This interesting summary of our affairs,” Washington concluded,

with respect to foreign powers between whom and the United States controversies have subsisted, and with regard also to those of our Indian neighbours, with whom we have been in a state of enmity or misunderstanding, opens a wide field for consoling and gratifying reflections. If by prudence and moderation on every side, the extinguishment of all the causes of external discord, which have heretofore menaced our tranquillity, on terms compatible with our national rights and honor, shall be the happy result; how firm and how precious a foundation will have been laid for accelerating, maturing and establishing the prosperity of our country.³⁸

The United States’ standing among its European peers did indeed improve in the 1790s as a direct result of the adoption of the Constitution. Before 1787, foreign observers sometimes questioned to what extent the thirteen united states could even be considered a nation. In 1778, France asked that the state governments ratify the treaties of alliance and of amity and commerce separately rather than as a union. With the Articles of Confederation not yet ratified, France could hardly have done otherwise. But even after Britain had formally recognized American independence, British politicians still insisted that diplomatic agreements “must be made with the states separately,” because “no treaty can be made with the American states that can be binding on the whole of them.” To concerned nationalists like Alexander Hamilton, the nation’s failure to live up to treaty obligations and to stand up for its interests in the international state system was an acute embarrassment. The country had “reached almost the last stage of national humiliation,” he complained in *The Federalist*. “There is scarcely any thing that can wound the pride, or degrade the character of an independent nation, which we do not experience.”³⁹

With a federal government in command over foreign policy and with a new Constitution that emphatically stated that “all Treaties made, or which shall be made,

under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land; and the Judges of every state shall be bound thereby, any Thing in the Constitution or Laws of any State to the Contrary notwithstanding,” foreign powers were willing to enter into agreements with the United States. Prior to 1789, the United States had treated with relative lightweight states like Sweden, Prussia, and Morocco. In the 1790s and 1800s, the Barbary powers continued to figure prominently in the nation’s diplomacy, but treaties and conventions were also frequently signed with Britain, France, and Spain, all European great powers that were also major players on the North American continent and in the Atlantic economy.⁴⁰

Although Washington was grateful that the nation had avoided involvement in the European war, his message made a reference to a recent demonstration of United States military power in western Pennsylvania. A large expeditionary force had put down the so-called Whiskey Rebellion, a protest against the federal excise on distilled spirits, and restored order in the region. “The misled have abandoned their errors, and pay the respect to our Constitution and laws which is due from good citizens to the public authorities of the society,” as Washington put it. Respect for the Constitution and federal laws had been achieved by an army of over 10,000 men. At roughly the same size as the Continental army that laid siege to Yorktown in the final stages of the War of Independence, this was an enormous undertaking for the government at the time. Its overwhelming response to the rebellion shows the administration’s determination to exert its sovereignty in the interior regions of the nation and to secure that taxes levied on the citizens were duly collected.⁴¹

The taxes collected by the United States went overwhelmingly to payments on the public debt in the early years of the federal government. In his message, Washington spoke of a process that had begun a year earlier, when he had asked Congress to adopt “a definite plan” for the final redemption of the debt. Such a plan should place “credit on grounds which can not be disturbed” as well as “prevent that progressive accumulation of debt which must ultimately endanger all governments.” Washington could place the debt on the congressional agenda thanks to the government’s rapidly increasing revenue. In what must have been one of the more surprising developments to contemporaries, the federal government went from the verge of bankruptcy to flush in the span of a few years after the adoption of the Constitution. In 1789, the first Congress promptly created a customs service and customs revenue would provide the mainstay of the government’s income for more than a century. From small beginnings, it rose from \$3.2 million in 1792 to \$5.6 million in 1795. When Jefferson became president, customs brought in more than \$10 million per year.⁴²

Up to 1795, the government made payments on the interest, but not on the principal of its debt, which then stood at close to \$80 million. But that year Congress adopted a plan that would set the three principal loans that made up the Revolutionary War debt on the road to extinction. Under this plan, the foreign debt was paid off in 1808, the so-called “six percent debt” in 1819, and the so-called “deferred six percent debt” in 1824. As these dates suggests, repayment was a prolonged process and the honor of finally liquidating the Revolutionary debt fell to the Jeffersonians rather than the Federalists. But the plan of debt redemption was adopted midway through the age of Federalism.

It would be a mistake to reduce the Federalists’ management of the public debt to a plan for its redemption. Rather, their principal achievement was the restoration

of public credit, which made possible renewed borrowing. During Hamilton's tenure at the Treasury Department, the government borrowed to finance Indian Wars and the expedition against the whiskey rebels, but it never had to finance a war with a European power. Washington's successor John Adams was less fortunate and had to contract new loans to pay for the naval build-up during the Quasi War with France. But it was the Jeffersonians, and statesmen in the Jeffersonian tradition, who made by far the greatest use of the government's ability to borrow. Public credit allowed the United States to purchase Louisiana. Public credit also allowed the United States to embark on its second war for independence against Britain in 1812. Loans paid for land acquired from Spain in 1819 and for compensation for territory and claims of Texas after the annexation of the state by the United States. Loans also paid for the invasion of Mexico in 1846. Tax revenue and loans, finally, paid for compensation to American Indians for land, for Indian wars, and for Indian removal.⁴³

The policies pursued in the decades after 1790 should be contrasted to the 1780s, when Congress was insolvent and impotent and therefore unable to pursue territorial expansion or to project military power. Although the territorial expansion of the United States cannot be explained by any single factor alone, the ability to raise taxes and to borrow money to pay for territorial cessions and military conquests certainly forms an important part of the explanation.

V

The considerable achievements that Washington listed had been brought about by a federal government that to a modern observer looks slimmed down to its bare bones. The central executive departments in Philadelphia and later in Washington were few in number and small in size. The field services they oversaw were of a scale to match. It is difficult to get beyond the sweeping verdict that the government was small to reach precise numbers, however. The United States began publication of its *Official Register*, which listed government officials, only in 1816. But even that publication listed only the officers of government, not the assistants these officers sometimes employed to help them perform their duties.⁴⁴

In the late 1790s, the Federalists came under increasing attack from the Jeffersonians, who accused them of reckless spending of public money and needless expansion of the federal bureaucracy. When Jefferson assumed the reins of power in 1801, he was determined to reduce both the cost and the size of the American state. In his first annual message, he remarked that given the restricted scope of the federal government, "we may well doubt whether our organization is not too complicated, too expensive; whether offices and officers have not been multiplied unnecessarily and sometimes injuriously to the service they were meant to promote." To find an answer to this question he laid before Congress a few months later a "Roll of the Officers, Civil, Military, and Naval, of the United States." It constitutes one of the first attempts ever made to enumerate federal government employees and Jefferson's roll provides a snapshot of the anatomy of the American state a little over a decade after the first Congress convened (Table 8.1).⁴⁵

In the nation's capital could be found four departments of state and the Post Office Department, all huddled close to the White House, as well as the Supreme Court, located

Table 8.1 The anatomy of the federal government, 1801.

<i>Central executive departments</i>	<i>Field services</i>
State	Ministers plenipotentiary Consuls Territorial government Mint
War	General Staff Army Quartermaster's Department Armories Military stores Agents for military fortifications Purveyor of public supplies Indian Department
Treasury	External revenue service Internal revenue service Commissioners of loans Superintendents of lighthouses Land Offices
Navy	Navy Marine Corps Naval Agents Superintendents of Navy yards
Post Office	Post offices
Supreme Court	Circuit Courts District Judges District Attorneys Marshalls

Source: "Roll of the Officers, Civil, Military, and Naval, of the United States," February 16, 1802, in *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States; Selected and Edited under the Authority of Congress*, 38 vols. (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1832–1861). Class X. Miscellaneous, 2 vols, I, 261–319.

in the Capitol, and the legislature and president. The organization of the executive departments bears testimony to the fact that the federal government's core concern was foreign affairs, broadly construed. The State, War, and Treasury Departments were all created in 1789. The Navy Department was added in 1798 during the Quasi War with France. With the exception of the Treasury they were all small in size. Discounting the secretaries, the State Department had a staff of six, the War and Navy Department of fifteen and sixteen. The Post Office managed with ten men. In this Lilliputian state, the Treasury appeared a giant with a personnel force of 66 officers and clerks.

Each executive department commanded a number of agents and administrations deployed outside the capital. Like the central departments, these were for the most

part very small organizations. The judiciary employed slightly more than a hundred judges, attorneys, marshals, and clerks. The Mint had thirteen staff. There were twelve Superintendents and 25 Keepers of lighthouses, nine Navy Agents, and 20 agents in the entire Indian Department. The only organizations of any real size were the Internal revenue service, soon to be discontinued by Jefferson, the Customs service, the postal service, the army, and the navy.⁴⁶

The small number of government officers meant that the federal government presence was thin on the ground. Yet there was a clear pattern to their deployment. The only service that could be found throughout the national domain was the postal service. The internal tax collector and the circuit judge made intermittent visits in many locations, but neither was a permanent presence. The other agents of the government were posted either outside the nation, along its waterfront and international borders, or in the federal territories in the continent's interior.

In 1801, the diplomatic service was formed of five ministers in major European capitals and a more extensive consular establishment. The consuls in the Barbary Powers of North Africa had a special status because these nations' repeated attacks on American shipping and their ransoming of American seamen meant that there was constant tension and danger of war in the Mediterranean. Washington and Adams avoided armed conflict, but Jefferson went to war against Tripoli in 1801–1805, and Madison against Algiers in 1815–1816. Other consuls served American merchants and sailors. The vast majority of them were based in Europe, but the United States had representatives in the West Indies and in more far-flung places such as the Cape of Good Hope and Calcutta (see Table 8.2).⁴⁷

Table 8.2 United States diplomatic establishment, 1801.

<i>Ministers</i>	<i>Consuls</i>				
Paris	Algiers	Cork	St. Domingo	Havana	Stettin
London	Tunis	Gibraltar	Aux Cayes	St. Jago de Cuba	Bremen
Madrid	Tripoli	Calcutta	Guadalupe	New Orleans	Hamburg
Lisbon	Tangiers	Paris	Cayenne	Lisbon	Francona
The Hague	London	Bordeaux	Isle of France	Tenerife	Gothenburg
	Falmouth	Havre de	Madrid	Amsterdam	Trieste
	Liverpool	Grace	Cadiz	Rotterdam	Genoa
	Bristol	Lorient	Alicante	Curacao	Livorno
	Poole	Nantes	Malaga	Demarara and	Rome
	Hull	Marseilles	St Andero	Essequibo	Naples
	Glasgow	Ostend	Barcelona	Cape of Good	Malta
	Leith	Dunkirk	Guira	Hope	
		Antwerp		Batavia	
				Copenhagen	

Source: “Roll of the Officers, Civil, Military, and Naval, of the United States,” February 16, 1802, in *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States; Selected and Edited under the Authority of Congress*, 38 vols. (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1832–1861). Class X. Miscellaneous, 2 vols, I, 306–308.

The Navy was a new institution when Jefferson came to power, and it had been created for use in the Quasi War with France. Its principal task was to protect American merchantmen, and its operations were primarily confined to the West Indies and the Mediterranean. The Army, in contrast, had been an important arm of the government ever since 1789. In February 1802, it was organized into four infantry regiments, two regiments of artillerists and engineers, and one regiment of dismounted cavalry. The total strength of the armed forces was a little more than 5,000. Jefferson's roll did not specify the location of the troops, but his Secretary of War, Henry Dearborn, submitted a list of garrisons to Congress in December 1801. As Table 8.3 shows, the troops

Table 8.3 Deployment of the U.S. army, 1801.

<i>Post</i>	<i>State or territory</i>	<i>Artillery companies</i>	<i>Infantry companies</i>
<i>Interior posts</i>			
Michillimackinac	Northwest Territory	1	1
Detroit	Northwest Territory	1	4
Niagara	New York	1	1
Fort Wayne	Northwest Territory		1
Pittsburgh and Cincinnati	Pennsylvania & Northwest Territory		1
Vincennes	Indiana Territory		1
Fort Massac	Northwest Territory		1
Southwest Point	Tennessee	1	2
Fort Pickering	Tennessee	1	
Fort Adams	Mississippi Territory	1	4
Fort Greene	Mississippi Territory		1
Fort Wilkinson	Georgia	1	3
<i>Coastal fortifications</i>			
Fort Moultrie	North Carolina	1	
Fort Johnson	South Carolina	1	
Fort Norfolk	Virginia	1	
Fort McHenry	Maryland	1	
Fort Mifflin and arsenal	Pennsylvania	2	
Fort Jay	New York	1	
West Point	New York	1	
Fort Trumbull	Connecticut	1	
Fort Wolcott	Rhode Island	1	
Fort Independence	Massachusetts	1	
Springfield arsenal	Massachusetts	1	
Fort Constitution & additional post	New Hampshire & Maine	1	

Source: "Estimate of all the posts and stations where garrisons will be expedient, and the number of men requisite for each garrison," December 23, 1801, in *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States; Selected and Edited under the Authority of Congress*, 38 vols. (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1832–1861). Class V. Military, 7 vols., I, 156.

were deployed in small contingents of one or a few companies, a unit that numbered 60 or so officers and privates. The artillerists and engineers were posted in the coastal fortifications that protected the nation's major harbors. The pattern of their deployment suggests that the War Department had an eye to the need to distribute its soldiers equally between the states. New York and Philadelphia were far more important ports than Norfolk or Wilmington, but all of them received the same degree of protection from the government.⁴⁸

Like the officers and men of the First and Second Regiment of Artillerists and Engineers and the Lighthouse service, the customs service also skirted the nation's coastline from Passamaquoddy Bay to St. Mary's, Georgia. Jefferson's roll recorded over 90 customs offices. Each was headed by a Collector appointed by the President. Larger establishments had a Naval Officer and Surveyor and some also had Masters and Mates commanding the US revenue cutters. All were appointed by the President. The revenue inspectors, port inspectors, weighers, measurers, and gaugers who made up most of the staff were appointed by the Collector, who therefore had considerable patronage power in major ports. Table 8.4 gives some indication of the variation in size of these offices. It is not a guide to the number of federal officials in the ports, however, because it lists offices rather than officers. As a rule, one and the same person filled the four offices of port inspector, measurer, weigher, and gauger, and the number of employees was therefore considerably smaller than the number of offices.

It is evident that the majority of the external revenue offices contributed little to the Treasury. The five ports of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston accounted for three-quarters to four-fifths of the money collected annually between 1792 and 1800. If Salem, Providence, Norfolk, Bermuda Hundred, Alexandria, and Savannah are added to these five ports, the figure rises to between 87 and 94 percent of annual collections. New York City and Philadelphia were the source of around half the government's customs revenue. Their importance is further

Table 8.4 U.S. external revenue service, 1801.

<i>State</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Number of Offices</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Number of Offices</i>
<i>New England</i>			<i>Middle states</i>		
New Hampshire	Portsmouth	33	New York	Lake Champlain	7
Massachusetts	Newburyport	16		Sagg Harbor	13
	Gloucester	9		Hudson	6
	Salem and Beverly	42		New York	57
	Ipswich	5		Oswego	1
	Marblehead	12		Niagara	1
	Boston	57	New Jersey	Burlington	2
	Plymouth	12		Little Egg Harbor	3
	Barnstable	8		Bridgetown	2
				Great Egg Harbor	3

	Nantucket	11		Perth Amboy	2
	Edgartown	5	Pennsylvania	Philadelphia	50
	New Bedford	12		Presqu'isle	1
	Dighton	10	Delaware	Wilmington	16
	York	9		<i>Upper South</i>	
	Biddeford	22	Maryland	Baltimore	66
	Portland	22		Vienna	1
	Kennebunk	10		Snow Hill	7
	Bath	15		Oxford	1
	Frenchman's Bay	1		Nottingham	4
	Wiscasset	13		Nanjemoy	5
	Waldoborough	10		Annapolis	1
	Penobscot	15		Georgetown	2
	Machias	11		Chester	1
Vermont		n.a.		Havre de Grace	1
Rhode Island	Newport	34	Virginia	Norfolk	40
	Providence	23		Petersburg	14
Connecticut	New London	39		Richmond	3
	Middletown	38		Tappahanock	10
	New Haven	18		Yeocomico	2
	Fairfield	8		Cherrystone	1
	<i>Lower South</i>			Dumfries	2
South Carolina	Georgetown	7		Hampton	1
	Charleston	47		South Quay	1
	Beaufort	1		Alexandria	15
Georgia	Brunswick	1		Folly Landing	4
	Savannah	38	Kentucky	Louisville	1
	St Mary's	3	North Carolina	Wilmington	24
	Hardwick	1		Newbern	26
	Sunbury	1		Washington	19
	<i>U.S. Territories</i>			Edenton	25
	Detroit	3		Camden	29
	Mississippi	1			
	Massac	1			
	Illinois	1			
	Michilimackinac	1			
	Cincinnati	1			
	Erie	1			

Source: "Roll of the Officers, Civil, Military, and Naval, of the United States," February 16, 1802, in *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States; Selected and Edited under the Authority of Congress*, 38 vols. (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1832-1861). Class X. Miscellaneous, 2 vols, I, 261-79.

underlined by the fact that the federal government had very few sources of income besides customs revenue. As with the coastal garrisons it is difficult not to conclude that considerations of state parity within the union rather than administrative efficiency played a role in the creation of many external revenue offices.⁴⁹

In contrast to the artillery, the four regiments of infantry were posted mainly in the federal territories in the interior of the nation. Some companies guarded the borderlands from Spanish threats in the South and British in the North. Others kept an eye on the powerful Indian nations in the old North- and Southwest. Fort Wilkinson guarded against the Creek nation, Southwest Point against the Cherokees, and Fort Wayne and Detroit against the Northwest confederacy. Federal government presence in the territories and borderlands also took the form of three territorial governments, four Land Offices, and a handful of agents in the Indian Department. All were miniscule organizations. Territorial governments consisted of a governor, a secretary and three justices, the Land Offices of a receiver and a register.

It was common for different federal agencies to come together in the same location to form little nexuses of federal power in the western marches. Fort Wilkinson hosted three officers of the Indian Department responsible for diplomatic relations with the Creeks. Indian Department agents in Cherokee country were located at Tellico Blockhouse, close to the army contingent at Southwest Point. Vincennes was the location of the territorial government of Indiana and an army garrison. Cincinnati had a land office and an army post. Another land office was at Chilicote, which was also the seat of the government of the Northwest Territory.

VI

Despite its small size—it really was, as John Murrin has said, “a midget institution in a giant land”—the federal government was essential to the development of the United States. In the short run, the clearest evidence of the successful reform of the union is that the rebuilt ship of state managed to sail unharmed, if not altogether untroubled, through the storm of the French Revolution and the ensuing quarter-century of world-wide war. This period brought down kings and empires on both sides of the Atlantic, and it placed great stress on the Union, particularly during the War of 1812. But the fabric of the Union held. The decades that followed on the Constitution’s adoption were also a time of territorial expansion. At first the federal government organized the national domain in the territories, setting up and policing an Indian frontier and transferring land from Native Americans to white settlers. Later on it would expand the nation’s sovereignty over the North American continent, first in 1804, then in 1819, 1845, 1848, 1853, and, finally, in 1867.⁵⁰

The Philadelphia convention did not solve the tension that resulted from conflicting sectional interests. To the contrary, the Constitution facilitated the articulation of sectional interests through the representation of the states in the Senate and the guarantee to protect state interests such as the preservation of slavery. Sectionalism would be the great scourge to the American union after the pressing matters of international weakness had been resolved. By 1861, internal conflict overwhelmed the desire for union. Yet despite the civil war, in the seven decades that preceded it, the Constitution provided the institutional basis on which the nation would grow in territory, population, and riches. That legacy provided the foundation that propelled

the United States to world power status beginning after the Reconstruction era had ended. In the long run, therefore, and much like John Fiske suggested in 1888, the framers of the Constitution demonstrated that republics were not forever destined to weakness and instability, but could become powerful even to the point of world domination.

NOTES

- 1 John Fiske, *The Critical Period of American History, 1783–1789* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899 [1888]), 55; Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969) 393.
- 2 Congressional Ratification of the Definitive Treaty of Peace,” in Mary A. Giunta, ed., *The Emerging Nation: A Documentary History of the Foreign Relations of the United States under the Articles of Confederation, 1780–1789*, 3 vols. (Washington, DC: National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1996) I, 963–67.
- 3 Fiske, *Critical Period*, 223.
- 4 *Ibid.*, vi–vii.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 308–9; Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1955 [1930 rev. ed.]) I, 332–33).
- 6 Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1913) 48; Beard and Beard, *Rise of American Civilization* I, 303.
- 7 Merrill Jensen, *The Articles of Confederation: An Interpretation of the Social-Constitutional History of the American Revolution 1774–1781* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976 [1940], xv and 245; Merrill Jensen, *The New Nation: A History of the United States During the Confederation, 1781–1789* (New York: Knopf 1950), 128, 423.
- 8 Peter S. Onuf, “A Declaration of Independence for Diplomatic Historians,” *Diplomatic History*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1998), 71–83; David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Leonard J. Sadosky, *Revolutionary Negotiations: Indians, Empires, and Diplomats in the Founding of America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press 2009); David M. Golove and Daniel J. Hulsebosch, “A Civilized Nation: The Early American Constitution, the Law of Nations, and the Pursuit of International Recognition,” *New York University Law Review*, vol. 85, no. 4 (2010), 932–1066, quotation at 934; Robbie J. Totten, “Security, Two Diplomacies, and the Formation of the U.S. Constitution: Review, Interpretation, and New Directions for the Study of the Early American Period,” *Diplomatic History*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2012), 77–117. Two recent works providing an updated Beardian interpretation are Terry Bouton, *Taming Democracy: “The People,” the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007).
- 9 “The Declaration of Independence,” in *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, ed. Merrill Jensen, John P. Kaminski and Gaspare J. Saladino, 20 vols. to date (1976–) I, 73–75 (hereafter *DHRC*); Onuf, “Declaration of Independence,” *Diplomatic History*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Winter 1998), 71–83; Armitage, *Declaration of Independence*.
- 10 John Adams to Patrick Henry, June 3, 1776, in *The Papers of John Adams*, ed. Robert J. Taylor, Gregg L. Lint, and C. Walker. 15 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977–2010), IV, 234–35; Peter S. Onuf, “The First Federal Constitution: The Articles of Confederation,” in *The Framing and Ratification of the Constitution*, ed. Leonard W. Levy and Dennis J. Mahoney (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 85.
- 11 “Preface to the Debates in the Convention,” in James Madison, *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787, Reported by James Madison* (Athens: Ohio University Press,

- 1966), 3; David C. Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003).
- 12 Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. and ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 131–32; Alexander Hamilton, “The Federalist 9,” in *The Federalist*, ed. Jacob E. Cooke (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 52–54.
- 13 “Committee Report on Carrying the Confederation into Effect and on Additional Powers Needed by Congress,” in *DHRC*, I:145; Journals of Congress, June 7, 1776, Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789, ed. Worthington C. Ford, John Clement Fitzpatrick, and Roscoe R. Hill. 34 vols. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1904–1937) (hereafter *JCC*) V, 425; Act of Confederation of the United States of America, *DHRC* I, 78, 86, 88–91; Jack N. Rakove, *The Beginnings of National Politics: An Interpretative History of the Continental Congress* (New York: Knopf, 1979), 135–91; Sadosky, *Revolutionary Negotiations*, 59–89.
- 14 Rakove, *Beginnings of National Politics*, 157–58, 162, 172, 276; John M. Murrin, “1787: The Invention of American Federalism,” in *Essays on Liberty and Federalism: The Shaping of the U.S. Constitution*, ed. John M. Murrin, David E. Narrett, and Joyce S. Goldberg (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1988), 32; Hendrickson, *Peace Pact*, 136. A court of appeals that heard admiralty appeals from state trial courts existed during the Confederation. See Henry J. Bourguignon, *The First Federal Court: The Federal Appellate Prize Court of the American Revolution, 1775–1787* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1977). Executive departments also developed toward the close of the War of Independence. A post office was set up already in 1775, and departments for foreign affairs, war, and finance were created in 1781. The Continental Army could, of course, be seen as a field service of Congress, and there were diplomatic agents and collectors of revenue.
- 15 John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 365; Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 156–57; “The Essex Results,” in *The Founders’ Constitution*, ed. Philip P. Kurland and Ralph Lerner, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) I, 117; Sadosky, *Revolutionary Negotiations*, 85; Onuf, *Origins of the Federal Republic*; Rakove, *Beginnings of National Politics*, 163–215. The first draft of the Articles made specific use of the term “internal police” in the third article: “Each colony shall retain and enjoy as much of the its present Laws, Rights, and Customs, as it may think fit, and reserves to itself the sole and exclusive Regulation of Government of its internal police, in all matters that shall interfere with the Articles of this Confederation,” Draft of Articles of Confederation, *DHRC* I, 79.
- 16 Adams and Braxton quoted in Rakove, *Beginnings of National Politics*, 148–49; Burke quoted in Hendrickson, *Peace Pact*, 135; Murrin, “Invention of American Federalism,” 20–47, quotation at 32; Onuf, “First Federal Constitution,” 89; Hendrickson, *Peace Pact*, 135–37.
- 17 Journals of Congress, November 17, 1777, *JCC* IX, 932–34; North Carolina, “Report of a Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons, December 19, 1777,” *DHRC* I, 124. The amendments and other documents pertaining to the ratification of the Articles of Confederation are in *DHRC* I, 95–137. Rakove, *Beginnings of National Politics*, 186–90; Hendrickson, *Peace Pact*, 147–49.
- 18 John M. Murrin, “A Roof without Walls: The Dilemma of American National Identity,” in Richard Beeman, Edward C. Carter II, and Stephen Botein, eds., *Beyond Confederation*, 333–34; Eric Slauter, *The State as a Work of Art: The Cultural Origins of the Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 39–85.
- 19 In very different ways this is the interpretative shift in both Lance Banning, *The Sacred Fire of Liberty: James Madison and the Founding of the Federal Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 111–91, and Gordon S. Wood, “Is There a James Madison

- Problem’?” in *Liberty and American Experience in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. David Womersley (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2006), 425–47. For the discussion in the second and third sections of this chapter I am indebted in particular to Banning, *Sacred Fire of Liberty*; Greene, “Colonial History and National History,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d. ser., 64 (April 2007), 235–50; Cathy D. Matson and Peter S. Onuf, *A Union of Interests: Political Economic Thought in Revolutionary America* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1990), 101–23; Sonia Mittal, Jack N. Rakove, and Barry R. Weingast, “The Constitutional Choices of 1787 and Their Consequences,” in *Founding Choices*, ed. Irwin and Sylla, 25–56; Murrin, “Invention of American Federalism,” 20–47; Jack N. Rakove, *Revolutionaries: A New History of the Invention of America* (London: Heinemann, 2010), 362–84; and Michael P. Zuckert, “A System without Precedent: Federalism in the American Constitution,” in *Framing and Ratification of the Constitution*, ed. Levy and Mahoney, 132–50.
- 20 [James Madison], “Notes on Ancient and Modern Confederacies” and “Vices of the Political System of the United States,” in *The Papers of James Madison*, ed. William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal, 10 vols (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1962–1991) IX, 3–24, 345–58, quotation at 352 (henceforth cited as *PJM*).
 - 21 Farrand, *Records of Federal Convention I*, 315–21; James Madison to George Washington, April 16, 1787, *PJM* IX, 384.
 - 22 Banning, *Sacred Fire of Liberty*, 111–91; James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, September 6, 1787, and Madison to Jefferson, October 24, 1787, *PJM* X, 163–64, 212.
 - 23 Banning, *Sacred Fire of Liberty*, 115 (quotation), 159; James Madison, “Federalist No. 45,” in *The Federalist*, ed. Cooke, 314.
 - 24 Farrand, *Records of Federal Convention I*, 18–19, 20, 133. When Randolph responded to the New Jersey plan, he again defined the purposes of union in terms of defense, interstate harmony, and commercial regulation. See *ibid.*, 262–3.
 - 25 Farrand, *Records of Federal Convention II*, 158–59; James Madison, “Federalist No. 45,” in *The Federalist*, ed. Cooke, 314. The original draft of the Pinckney plan has never been found, and scholars have had to reconstruct his proposal. See Richard Beeman, *Plain, Honest Men: The Making of the American Constitution* (New York: Random House, 2009), 96–97; J. Franklin Jameson, “Portions of Charles Pinckney’s Plan for a Constitution, 1787,” *American Historical Review* 8 (1903): 117–20; Andrew C. McLaughlin, “Sketch of Charles Pinckney’s Plan for a Constitution, 1787,” *American Historical Review* 9 (1904), 735–41.
 - 26 Alexander Hamilton, “Federalist No. 23,” in *The Federalist*, ed. Cooke, 146–47; James Madison, “Political Observations,” April 20, 1795, *PJM* XV, 515. Madison also remarked that commercial retaliation against Britain “had been first, and most contemplated in forming” the Constitution, *PJM* XV, 513. Thomas Jefferson to Gideon Granger, August 13, 1800, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd. 37 vols. (Princeton, 1950–2006) XXXII, 96; Jefferson, “First Annual Message,” *Papers* XXXVI:60; Jefferson to Destutt de Tracy, January 26, 1811, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney et al., 9 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004–2010) IV, 337–38.
 - 27 [John Jay], “An Address to the People of the State of New York, April 15, 1788,” in *DHRC* VIII, 108–9.
 - 28 Noah Webster, *Sketches of American Policy . . .* (Hartford, CT: Hudson and Goodwin, 1785), 22.
 - 29 Farrand, *Records of Federal Convention I*, 21, 34, 54; Madison to Thomas Jefferson, October 24, 1787, *PJM* X, 207.
 - 30 “The Virginia Resolutions,” *DHRC* I, 243–45.
 - 31 James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, March 19, 1787, Madison to Edmund Randolph, April 8, 1787, Madison to George Washington, April 16, 1787, all in *PJM* IX, 317–22,

- 368–71, 382–87, quotation at 385; Farrand, *Records of Federal Convention I*, 33, quotation at 124.
- 32 Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), 239–87; Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*, 524–35; Wood, “The Political Ideology of the Founders,” in *Toward a More Perfect Union: Six Essays on the Constitution*, ed. Neil L. York (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1988), 20–24.
- 33 David F. Ericson, *Slavery in the American Republic: Developing the Federal Government, 1791–1861* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2011); Stephen J. Rockwell, *Indian Affairs and the Administrative State in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- 34 The unsurpassed guide to the period is Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788–1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- 35 Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 303–449, 529–690; Douglass C. North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790–1860* (New York: Norton, 1966 [1961]), 17–58.
- 36 George Washington, “Seventh Annual Address,” in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789–1908*, ed. James D. Richardson (Washington, DC: Bureau of Art and Literature, 1908), 182–86.
- 37 Charles J. Kapler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. II (Treaties) (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1904); *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution 1896–97*, pt 2: *Indian Land Cessions in the United States 1784–1894*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., H.R. Doc. No. 736/3, 56th Cong., 1st Sess. (1899), U.S. Serial Set Number 4015; *Indians Removed to West Mississippi from 1789*, H.R. Doc. 147, 25th Cong., 3d Sess. (1838), Statement B, 9. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*. Bicentennial Edition, 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1975) I, 24–37. For a history of the Indian treaties see Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Treaties: The History of a Political Anomaly* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994). On the federal government and Indian affairs see Rockwell, *Indian Affairs* and William H. Bergmann, *The American National State and the Early West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). On the Federalist record in the West, see Andrew R.L. Cayton, “Radicals in the ‘Western World’: The Federalist Conquest of Trans-Appalachian North America,” in *Federalists Reconsidered*, ed., Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 77–96.
- 38 Washington, “Seventh Annual Address,” in *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, ed., Richardson, I, 182–4; Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Jay’s Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962, rev ed.); Bemis, *Pinckney’s Treaty: America’s Advantage from Europe’s Distress, 1783–1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1960 rev. ed.); Jerald A. Combs, *The Jay Treaty: Political Battleground of the Founding Fathers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970); Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 375–449; Bradford Perkins, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations I: The Creation of a Republican Empire, 1776–1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 81–110.
- 39 Frederick W. Marks III, *Independence on Trial: Foreign Affairs and the Making of the Constitution* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973); Drew R. McCoy, “The Virginia Port Bill of 1784,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 84, no. 3 (Jul. 1975), 288–303; Onuf, *Origins of the Federal Republic*; Sadosky, *Revolutionary Negotiations*, 119–40; Golove and Hulsebosch, “A Civilized Nation,” *New York University*

- Law Review*, vol. 85 (Oct. 2010), 953–57, Lord Sheffield quoted on 957; Hamilton, “Federalist 15”, in *Federalist*, ed. Cooke, 91.
- 40 David Hunter Miller, ed., *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, 8 vols. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1931–1948) I, 55–62; Golove and Hulsebosch, “A Civilized Nation,” *New York University Law Review*, vol. 85 (Oct. 2010), *passim*.
- 41 Washington, “Seventh Annual Address,” in *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, ed. Richardson, I, 184; Richard H. Kohn, “The Washington Administration’s Decision to Crush the Whiskey Rebellion,” *Journal of American History*, vol. 59 (1972), 568–72; Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 461–88; James C. Miller, *The Federalist Era, 1789–1801* (New York: Harper, 1960), 155–59; James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 92–98; Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Stephen R. Boyd, ed., *The Whiskey Rebellion: Past and Present Perspectives* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985).
- 42 Washington, “Sixth Annual Address,” *Messages and Papers*, ed. Richardson, I, 167; Carl E. Prince and Mollie Keller, *The U.S. Customs Service: A Bicentennial History* (Washington, DC, 1989), 35–67; Report of the Secretary of the Treasury on the State of the Finances for the Year 1866, 39th Cong., 2nd Sess., H.R. Ex. Doc. 4, 306–7.
- 43 Max M. Edling, “‘So immense a power in the affairs of war’: Alexander Hamilton and the Restoration of Public Credit,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d. ser., vol. LXIV, no. 2 (April, 2007), 287–326.
- 44 Administrative history remains a dormant field and Leonard D. White, *The Federalists; a study in administrative history* (New York: Macmillan, 1948) the standard account of the federal government in this period. Important new work in this area is now done by Peter Kastor and Gautham Rao.
- 45 Thomas Jefferson, “Sixth Annual Address,” *Messages and Papers*, ed. Richardson, I, 328; “Roll of the Officers, Civil, Military, and Naval, of the United States,” February 16, 1802, in *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States; Selected and Edited under the Authority of Congress*, 38 vols. (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1832–1861). Class X. Miscellaneous, 2 vols, I, 261–319.
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- 47 For more on the diplomatic service, see Gene Bauer, The Early American Foreign Service Database at www.eafsd.org/.
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ADDITIONAL NOTE

Portions of this essay were previously published as Max M. Edling, “‘A Mongrel Kind of Government’: The U.S. Constitution, The Federal Union, and the Origins of the American State,” in Peter Onuf and Peter Thompson, eds., *State and Citizen: British America and the Early United States*, pp. 150–177, © 2013 by the Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia. Reprinted by permission of the University of Virginia Press.

CHAPTER NINE

THE EMPIRE OF LIBERTY

Land of the Free and Home of the Slave



Peter S. Onuf

When Thomas Jefferson looked westward, he saw free land. There was “room enough for our descendants to the thousandth and thousandth generation,” he famously intoned in his March 4, 1801 inaugural address. Free-born sons of the new American republic could establish farms there and achieve the independence that would in turn sustain republican government. Of course, the new president well knew, the western hinterland was no *terra nullius*. Indian peoples retained control over their ancestral lands, and the new nation’s counter-revolutionary imperial rivals were eager to curb its continental pretensions. And the loyalties of settlers who were already taking up Jefferson’s offer were tenuous at best: their independence depended on military protection, courts, secure land titles, and access to markets. Jefferson’s idealized image of the yeoman farmer was the product, not the predicate, of the conquest of the West. The land would be *made* free, emptied of native denizens and European rivals, as successive generations of state-sponsored settlers spread westward.

Jefferson was convinced that the United States possessed “the strongest government on earth.” It would be able to preserve the great empire that Britain had so heedlessly squandered, for every patriotic American “at the call of the law, would fly to the standard of the law, and would meet invasions of public order as his own personal concern.”¹ The British Empire collapsed because the exorbitant demands of a distant and unresponsive metropolitan government had threatened the liberty and property of provincial Americans. Misguided British tax policies subverted Americans’ fealty to King George, sundering the fundamental attachments that had enabled them to identify with British rule.² Republicanism, Jefferson suggested, restored the broken link between the “personal” and the “public,” citizen and state. In effect, the republican citizen internalized and thus perfected the protection covenant—the exchange of allegiance for a benign and paternal protection—that made monarchical rule legitimate.³ Popular sovereignty thus constituted the culmination and apotheosis of modern governance, not its libertarian negation. The Americans’ new republican empire would succeed where the British Empire had failed. Britain’s corrupt and despotic rulers could not sustain the proper, constitutional balance of liberty and power; self-governing

Americans synthesized liberty and power, thus enabling their empire to expand across the continent.⁴

Relieved that the union had survived the succession crisis of 1800–1801, Jefferson exulted in the American prospect. Anticipating Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Jefferson proclaimed that the new nation's republican government was "the world's best hope." Had it not survived its recent crisis and the "experiment" proved "successful," republicanism's many critics would have been vindicated.⁵ Disunion would inexorably have led to a state of war among the states or partial unions, to European interventions, and to counter-revolution. Without an effective central government, the West would be lost. "In the wide field of Western territory," Alexander Hamilton predicted during the controversy over the ratification of the federal Constitution, "we perceive an ample theatre for hostile pretensions" among states with conflicting claims—not to mention Indians or imperial rivals.⁶ An anarchic New World would replicate the image of the war-torn Old World. But the survival of the federal union offered a compelling vision of world peace. Although the American state-republics had "ample" cause for conflict—over territory, commerce, or foreign policy—they had found a way to contain and diffuse belligerent impulses.⁷ Perpetuating and perfecting the union enabled the American states to avoid war, the characteristic pathology of old regime Europe. "Wars and contentions, indeed, fill the pages of history," Jefferson wrote a European friend in 1807. But the "silent course of happiness" in the United States "for now upwards of twenty years . . . furnishes nothing for history to say." "While Europe has been in constant volcanic eruption," the new nation flourished, offering a preview of the "end of history."⁸

Sustaining peace among the new American republics, and delegating the once royal prerogative powers of war and peace to an energetic but limited federal government, enabled them all to share in the bounty of a vast hinterland open for development. At peace with one another, they would be secure against the world. Generations of Americans spreading across space would be bound to one another by ties of common interest, affection and kinship, reproducing the attachments that bound families—and the great republican family of families—across time. For Jefferson and other Revolutionaries this was an inspiring vision that spoke to the deepest aspirations of an enlightened and sentimental age: raising Americans from semi-barbarous provincial obscurity to play an exalted role in the progress of civilization.⁹

Yet if the American Revolution marked an epochal moment in world history, with all eyes "opened, or opening to the rights of man," the "general spread of the light of science" blinded patriotic Americans to more fundamental continuities.¹⁰ The "empire for liberty" that Jefferson envisioned was, after all, an empire—a domain of power—in which a particular people pursued its interests at the expense of other peoples. Enterprising provincial planters, farmers, merchants and speculators had long sought access to the hinterland—and to overseas markets—seeing themselves as agents of empire. Colonization was the business of empire.

Britain's victories in the Seven Years' War, and the resulting expansion of jurisdiction and opening of opportunity across a vast North American hinterland, led to an unprecedented outburst of imperial patriotism throughout the colonies. Loyal subjects of George III saw their claims to a greater British identity buttressed by their participation in the great war for the continent. Their vision of a transatlantic British

nationality was reflected in Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence: "we might have been a free and a great people together."¹¹ That national identity was grounded in a conception of empire that the British—unwilling to treat their fellow American subjects as their equals—had betrayed. Patriotic Americans proceeded to make war against their former sovereign and declare their own sovereignty in order to vindicate their imperial vision. Jefferson's Inaugural Address was a paean to republican empire, a colonizer's dream of land acquisition, plantation building, institutional replication, and the extension of law, liberty, and civility. It was a dream that was compatible with, and indeed depended on, the expropriation of contested territory and the exploitation of servile labor: "the land of the free" was also "the home of the slave." Fulfilling Jefferson's vision depended on effectively mobilizing "the strongest government on earth."¹²

PROVINCIAL RIGHTS

The leaders of the American resistance movement were provincial patriots as well as imperial patriots. Their primary goal was to secure the rights of the provincial governments they dominated from encroachments by metropolitan authorities. Spurred by British efforts to rationalize and reform imperial administration in the aftermath of the Seven Years' War, American patriots promoted a conception of empire predicated on a plurality of jurisdictions bound together by allegiance to a common king.¹³ The hope of forging a "more perfect union" under the Crown antedated the imperial crisis as provincial elites consolidated their authority in the colonial assemblies. Fashioning themselves as "little parliaments," provincial Whigs mimicked the metropolitan prototype as they wielded local tax powers to domesticate royal governors and limit the authority of other imperial officials. They imagined that each colony, like the mother country, had a "constitution" that guaranteed the king's overseas subjects the same rights Britons enjoyed at home. If each colony had a constitution, it followed that the empire as a whole must be bound together by some sort of constitution as well. The multivalent term "union" reflected the broad spectrum of constitutional possibilities, from assimilation in a single inclusive state—as when England and Scotland formed the United Kingdom under the 1707 Act of Union—to the alliance, or "union," of independent powers under the law of nations.¹⁴

The imperial crisis constituted an inconclusive and increasingly polarized rehearsal of these constitutional possibilities. Skeptical British policy-makers rejected the idea of constitutional union on any terms. That semi-barbarous provincials could be incorporated into the British nation—and thus enjoy the full panoply of English rights—was simply unthinkable.¹⁵ They were convinced that provincial rights agitation therefore masked a drive for independence, notwithstanding fulsome expressions of allegiance to the king: in the context of contemporary geopolitics, independence could only mean union *against* Britain through alliance with its enemies, particularly France.¹⁶ Adam Smith was exasperated by the obtuseness of this response. Policy-makers were beguiled by a vision of "a great empire on the west side of the Atlantic . . . that has existed in imagination only," and therefore could not come to any realistic accommodation of the imperial crisis. Smith favored an incorporating union that would secure free trade "between all the different parts of the British empire," but independence and a *commercial* alliance or union could achieve the same benign result.¹⁷

Metropolitan observers dismissed the delusional American premise that there either was an imperial “constitution” or that a “treaty” could be negotiated that would in future function as a constitution. After all, Parliament supposedly had had the last word on this vexing question when it asserted its sovereignty over the colonies “in all cases whatsoever” in the 1766 Declaratory Act. But for Smith, it was Parliament itself that was in the grip of a delusion. Far from seeking independence, reluctant Americans had been driven *from* the empire in order to gain the more perfect union they had long sought *within* it. The belated American Declaration of Independence (finally issued almost fifteen months after the war began) and its bloated catalogue of grievances testified eloquently to that reluctance.

If union was a tactical necessity for the American state-republics, subsequent developments made clear that it was far more than that. A more perfect union in their fragment of the empire would fulfill the imperial ambitions of colonists-cum-colonizers; it would also enable them to negotiate more favorable terms of trade than short-sighted mercantilists had been willing to allow. Free traders may have hoped that other trading partners would take Britain’s place, but the great *desideratum* of American commercial policy was to gain freer access to British and British colonial markets. If American patriots cherished their independence and continued to stoke Anglophobic sentiments well into the next century, the United States would nonetheless grow prosperous and powerful as an integral part of Britain’s informal, free trade empire.¹⁸ This too would be an empire without a constitution, though Americans would now participate as equals in forging a “special,” if at first often strained, postcolonial relationship through diplomacy, war and international law-making.

Recognition was the central issue in the imperial crisis and in the early decades of American independence. As Eliga Gould persuasively argues, the Revolutionaries’ leading goal was to establish the new nation’s “treaty-worthiness” and thus “to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them.”¹⁹ Patriots had first sought the “equal station” in the empire, to which they believed they were entitled by the imperial constitution over which King George III, “chief magistrate of the British empire,” presided.²⁰ A successful bid for international recognition would secure American membership in the family of nations, or in what jurists called the “republic” or “Commonwealth” of Europe.²¹ The law of nations functioned as this great republic’s “constitution,” and its animating principle was the equality of member states, regardless of regime type or relative power.

The claim to equality was predicated on a state’s capacity to make war, and therefore peace, and this capacity in turn depended on its legitimacy. The run-up to Revolution had been a protracted crisis of legitimate authority that incapacitated British rule. The Revolutionaries’ great challenge was to justify the power they assumed and thus to gain recognition of their right to rule by a critical proportion of the population. It was through the process of popular political mobilization, culminating in the civic ritual of constitution-writing, that the idea of equality was democratized.²² Patriots identified their own equality as citizens with the corporate equality of provinces in the empire and of nations in the world. “Rights talk” thus linked the individual citizen, equal to all other citizens, with what Jefferson later described as a “gradation” of higher authorities, equal on their respective planes and equally responsive to and dependent on those below.²³

The republic's power depended on the reciprocal recognition that bound republican citizens to each other and to the "public servants" who discharged the responsibilities of governance in their name. Recognition led to identification in a transcendent sense of national belonging that justified the ultimate sacrifice. The virtuous citizen, Jefferson exclaimed, "will let the heart be torn out of his body sooner than his power be wrested from him by a Caesar or a Bonaparte." The citizen identified with the nation—its power was *his* power—and confronted his nation's enemies as if they too were individuals, "a Caesar or a Bonaparte."²⁴ By inspiring citizens to identify so completely with the nation, republicanism—or what we would call democracy—made the mobilization of unprecedented force possible. Here, Jefferson was convinced, was the conclusive refutation of the conventional argument for a hierarchical social and political order, animated by command and coercion. The principle of equality unleashed the power of a consenting people, exercising "a prodigious influence . . . on the workings of society" that would astonish Alexis de Tocqueville.²⁵

Jefferson invoked the equality principle in the Declaration of Independence, offering the world a recapitulation of the social contract theory of John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*. Locke and fellow contract theorists theorized about rights and the origins of legitimate government by conjuring up a state of nature as a point of departure for human history.²⁶ In Jefferson's formulation, all men were originally "created equal & independent" and from "that equal creation they derive rights inherent & inalienable, among which are the preservation of life, & liberty, & the pursuit of happiness." It followed that "governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed," in order "to secure these ends." Governments were legitimate to the extent that they preserved this original equality and this, of course, was what the King had failed to do. "Whenever any form of government shall become destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, & to institute new government, laying it's foundation on such principles & organising it's powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety & happiness."²⁷

It was in this original contract, at the beginning of history, that a particular group of individuals emerged from their natural state to become a "people." And it was only in their collective capacity that *some* men could then effectively claim the "inherent & inalienable" rights to which *all* men were equally entitled. The delegates who gathered in Philadelphia secured the equal rights of their respective peoples in the Declaration of Independence, "the fundamental act of union of these States."²⁸ That union in turn claimed an equal standing in the "commonwealth" of independent states. The progress of the equality principle toward ever higher levels of union limited the ambit of natural rights, excluding individuals or peoples beyond the bounds of the civic community.²⁹ The Revolutionaries' universalistic language was in effect exclusionary, justifying the mobilization of particular peoples against a distant, despotic, and illegitimate imperial government.

Social contract theory provided a unifying, homogenizing gloss on the disparate histories of the various colonies, enabling "Americans" to recognize each other as equals. The Declaration's litany of grievances, drawn from the experiences of particular colonies, resonated across the continent. As they mobilized in resistance to imperial authority, Americans recognized their capacity to make their own history by constituting new state governments and forging a federal union of equal states. The

resistance movement began when provincial ruling elites sought to secure their corporate interests in response to British efforts to reform imperial administration. Threatened with marginalization and displacement by a new, centralized bureaucracy and legal apparatus, patriot leaders appealed for broadening public support as they defended their colonial “constitutions” against imperial encroachments. Armin Mattes argues in his important new history of the equality principle in the American and French Revolutionary era that the equality idea thus first gained widespread currency at the corporate level. Anxieties about threats to corporate rights throughout the Western world had triggered constitutional resistance to centralizing reform efforts of modernizing fiscal-military states. Not surprisingly, Edmund Burke and other British friends of America thus could embrace the patriots’ defense of customary corporate rights. Their enthusiasm would only diminish as patriots began to invoke natural-rights arguments that threatened to subvert social order and good government.³⁰

In retrospect, the “logic of rebellion” appears inexorable. As patriot leaders sought to mobilize popular support for resistance and then revolution, they were forced to fashion a more inclusive, “democratic” conception of provincial liberties. The equality principle was thus unleashed from its original corporate context as the leadership’s calls for sacrifice gave rise to citizens’ demands for equal rights. Yet the thrust of mobilization was less democratic than republican, toward vindicating the corporate rights of distinct provinces that now constituted themselves as self-governing republics. Certainly the security of individual rights was a crucial measure of the legitimacy of the new American republics, and Revolutionaries liked to think that they were showing the way for other peoples to secure their rights in a progressively more enlightened world. But the American Revolution ultimately—and necessarily—pivoted on the question of sovereignty, not individual rights.³¹

Citizens could only claim liberties as individuals if the republics which were the source of their civic identities—and to which they owed their allegiance—could protect them against other sovereign powers. The constitutional crisis that destroyed the British Empire revolved around the corporate claims of the American provinces to equality within the empire. Americans resisted British policies in order to vindicate provincial liberties. Only reluctantly coming to Thomas Paine’s conclusion that the English constitution was nothing more than “the base remains of two ancient tyrannies, compounded with some new Republican materials,” and that it did not offer them equal protection—or any protection at all—Revolutionaries wrote new constitutions of their own and sought collective security through union.³² In circular fashion, these constitutions defined the “peoples” who wrote them, guaranteeing the equal rights of citizens even as they excluded noncitizens. Far from leveling distinctions, the state constitutions articulated the limits of distinct and exclusive political communities. The invocation of natural rights justified the radical challenge to monarchical authority, enabling Revolutionaries to claim equality for their federal union of self-constituted republics among the “powers of the earth.”

COLONIZING PATRIOTS

The freedoms these self-identified “Americans” sought were the freedoms of colonizers. Revolutionaries thought of themselves as a “people” or “peoples” in active and exclusive terms, as citizens mobilized in defense of their rights, not inclusively, as all

the inhabitants of their respective colonies. Jefferson's substitution of "pursuit of happiness" for Locke's "property" in the Declaration's recitation of "inalienable rights"—"life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"—captured this dynamic dimension of republican citizenship. Subjects, by contrast, were passive and dependent, unconscious of their rights or unwilling to defend them. In moral and civic terms, the slave was the citizen's antitype. The abjectly subject slave who did not seek his freedom, even at the risk of life, lacked the moral character of a free man; the slave could only lay a claim to his manhood by rejecting any attachment with the civic community—including that of household dependent—and making war against his master.³³

Whether or not they owned slaves, citizens of the new republics were "masters" or agents of their own destiny. Of course, many Americans resisted the Revolutionary appeal, remaining loyal to a king who had secured their liberty and property. Patriots vilified these loyalists as corrupt, cowardly, and ignorant, willingly forfeiting their rights in exchange for the evanescent privileges of royal patronage and protection. By contrast, slaves who crossed British lines and claimed the king's protection commanded the begrudging respect—and bitter enmity—of their former masters. Slaves were legitimate enemies. Loyalists were traitors who, for prudent or selfish reasons, *chose* to make war against their countrymen.

In fashioning their provincial histories, American patriots emphasized their ancestors' conscious choices to cross the ocean and establish new colonies. The colonies were not the possessions of a conquering king, nor were colonists conquered peoples. "America was not conquered by William the Norman," Jefferson wrote in his *Summary View of the Rights of British America*, "nor its lands surrendered to him, or any of his ancestors."³⁴ Patriots insisted that American colonists exercised the same right of expatriation as the Saxons who settled Britain. Colonists carried their rights with them to the new world, and so transformed the wilderness into civil, English spaces. The American claim stood in stark contrast to its metropolitan counterpoint. Thomas Hutchinson, the last royal governor of Massachusetts, famously asserted that there must be "an abridgement of what are called English liberties" in the colonies: "I doubt whether it is possible to project a system of government in which a colony 3000 miles distant from the parent state shall enjoy all the liberty of the parent state."³⁵ In Hutchinson's account, the practical enjoyment of rights or liberties depended on the parent state's protection. But the colonists had always protected themselves, Jefferson and his fellow patriots countered, assuming the burdens and risks of colonization as they subdued the wilderness and pacified their savage neighbors.

Jefferson emphasized the activity and agency of colonizers. The first settlers were "farmers, not lawyers," and their descendants only became conscious of their rights when they reflected on the history of migration and settlement and recognized the debt they owed to prior generations. The Declaration's invocation of "inalienable rights" underscored the colonists' capacity to act: rights were made manifest to these free-born Englishmen through the history they made as they improved the American wilderness. Patriots' resistance to imperial policy was grounded in identification with an Empire that Parliament's new "system of government" threatened to destroy. Hyperbolic predictions of their own imminent enslavement poignantly expressed colonizers' fears that they would be pacified, immobilized, and thus reduced to the utter subjection of their own human chattel.

Conceptions of liberty that colonists drew from their own historical experience should not be confused with timeless and universal natural rights claims we attribute to the Enlightenment. To the contrary, historian Michal Rozbicki powerfully argues, early modern conceptions of liberty were embedded in specific social relations, justifying the proper—socially sanctioned—exercise of power and reciprocal obligations.³⁶ There was no inherent contradiction in the idea that Englishmen had the “liberty” to own slaves, just as they could own landed “allodial” or freehold landed property. After all, land and labor were the citizen-colonizer’s essential tools. Patriots’ rights claims were thus a gloss on social facts, not a call to level all distinctions and begin the world anew. The “state of nature” they encountered was far removed from the contract theorists’ conjectural beginning of history, but was instead the anarchy of nations in a state of war. In order to vindicate their independence, Americans must win the ongoing war against their former sovereign and secure the recognition of “the powers of the earth.”

Americans would only “be reduced to a state of nature” in their relations with each other, Jefferson wrote, if their governments were “dissolved” and “their property annihilated.”³⁷ Reduced to that original, “natural” condition, they would be stripped of their collective identity: they would no longer be “Americans.” The coercive implementation of British imperial reforms would leave colonists in a state of utter subjection, unable to defend themselves or govern their own dependents. The Revolutionaries therefore had to win another war, at home, against potentially rebellious slaves who might otherwise be drawn into Britain’s counter-revolutionary alliance. Annihilation of slave property threatened to destroy American families and their households.

A king who offered protection to American slaves and treated them as his own subjects subverted the authority of slaveholders. It was hardly surprising that “we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes,” as British lexicographer Samuel Johnson so memorably complained.³⁸ Any recognition of slaves’ rights, even as the king’s lowliest subjects, called their masters’ civility—and therefore their British identity—into question.³⁹ Whether they were considered domestic dependants or simply private property, slaves could have no civil existence in the American provinces. Their masters’ “yelps” underscored the vulnerability of “what are *called* English liberties,” but which, in fact, were mere privileges, subject to abridgment by an all-powerful, whip-wielding sovereign. Masters then would be reduced to the level of their slaves. This was “revolution of the wheel of fortune,” the “exchange of situation,” that so horrified Jefferson as he contemplated the possibility of a war between the races, when “numbers, nature and natural means only” would determine the outcome.⁴⁰

American patriots resisted British imperial policy because of their intense identification with Britain’s imperial project. Seeing themselves as agents of empire, Americans believed that their status as free-born Britons was enacted and confirmed by the crucial role they played in promoting Britain’s prosperity and power at home and abroad. They were colonizers, not passive objects of colonization. The provincial liberties patriots defended were critical to the progress of settlement: a plurality of autonomous jurisdictions enabled colonists to distribute and secure land claims and to enact slave codes and other labor regulations.⁴¹ Reflecting on their own history, colonists were convinced that colonization benefited the empire as a whole.

The rights they claimed under their respective “constitutions” reinforced their attachments to the empire and allegiance to the king. But imperial reform measures after the Seven Years’ War threatened colonists’ rights, and therefore their equal standing in the empire, by assaulting the integrity and autonomy of provincial jurisdictions.

Boundary changes and curbs on settlement, including the ban on trans-Appalachian settlement in the royal Proclamation of October 7, 1763, called the future of colonization into question.⁴² Instead of opening up a vast hinterland for new settlement, the elimination of France’s North American empire led to contraction and consolidation. Imperial officials sought to secure Indian country from settlers’ encroachments, thus setting the stage for the counter-revolutionary alliance between “merciless Indian Savages” and the British crown that Jefferson decried in the Declaration of Independence. Withdrawing his protection from loyal American subjects, George III unleashed these savages, “whose only know rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions,” on defenseless frontier settlements. Jefferson conjured up a nightmarish vision of the empire turned upside down, with the king deploying his savage subjects to turn back the tide of civilized settlement.⁴³

DECLARING INDEPENDENCE

The Declaration of Independence announced the birth of a new people, dedicated to freedom and founding their new governments on the basis of universal and self-evident natural rights principles. Its catalogue of grievances against George III offered a contrasting image of a corrupt and despotic old regime that had threatened to reduce his American subjects to slavery. Revolutionaries rejected metropolitan caricatures of their provincial societies as degenerate and semi-barbarous and therefore in need of strong government. As the imperial crisis deepened and patriot resistance raised the specter of anarchy, British attitudes hardened. Revolutionaries argued instead that the “royal brute of Britain” and the “merciless Indian savages” he unleashed on the American frontier were the real enemies of civilization. While Americans promoted the progress of civilization across the continent, the imperial government curbed settlement and initiated fiscal and administrative reforms that deprived colonists of their liberty and property. Patriots asserted their “American” identity when they dressed up as Indians and dumped tea into Boston Harbor, but they did not identify with the continent’s original proprietors. To the contrary, these ersatz “Indians” asserted their own exclusive claim to the continent when they declared their independence. The Revolution would be as much a war against the Indians and on behalf of slavery as it was a war against the British tyrant.

The Declaration echoed and amplified a broadly shared sense of frustration and betrayal against George III.⁴⁴ As colonists struggled to vindicate their rights against a king who no longer protected them, they could no longer recognize the empire that they had so recently celebrated. The empire’s transformation alienated provincial Americans, the true imperialists, and forced them to see themselves as a separate people. A crucial dimension of this new collective self-understanding was an awareness of the threats posed by other hostile peoples, including slaves as well as Indian “savages,” who might be enlisted in the counter-revolutionary cause. Jefferson thus accused George of “exciting domestic insurrections amongst us,” a reference to Lord Dunmore’s proclamation of November 1775 promising freedom to Virginia’s slaves.

Jefferson's cautious congressional colleagues excised a more controversial passage, blaming the king for the slave trade. A "candid world" might well see this charge—that "he has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere"—as yet another "yelp" from Johnson's slaveholders.⁴⁵ Later in life Jefferson, anxious to burnish his antislavery legacy, attributed Congress's editorial decision to New England slave traders and their eager customers in the deeper south.⁴⁶ But the logic of the excised passage was very much in accord with American colonizers' conception of empire. American slaveholders could deny responsibility for the slave trade because they were acting in good faith as agents of empire, exploiting white and black servile labor to conquer the North American continent and so promote the empire's prosperity and power. Americans were only driven to resistance as the imperial government imposed curbs on colonization.

George III "prostituted" his authority, making himself responsible for this "execrable commerce," when his Privy Council vetoed legislation by Virginia and Maryland "to prohibit or to restrain" the slave trade. Royal solicitude for "the immediate advantages of a few British corsairs" in the trade, as Jefferson had earlier written, thus trumped "the lasting interests of the American states."⁴⁷ These provincial initiatives, his draft of the Declaration now intimated, augured a more enlightened era when colonization—or the expansion of what he later would call the American "empire for liberty"—might no longer depend on slavery. Jefferson's immediate concern was *not* with emancipation, however, but rather with Privy Council encroachment on provincial authority over the institution of slavery. The "right" to limit slave imports was a logical extension of provincial slave codes and was therefore vital to their very survival.⁴⁸ That a surplus supply of slaves might lead to servile insurrection was no paranoid fantasy, for George III was "now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which *he* has deprived them, by murdering the people upon whom *he* also obtruded them; thus paying off former crimes committed against the *liberties* of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the *lives* of another."⁴⁹ In short, as Jefferson would insist throughout his career, slaveholders themselves—not a distant imperial or federal government—knew best how to manage their own slaves. Local legal authority over slavery was critical to the preservation and expansion of the "empire of liberty." In their wisdom, enlightened slaveholders might one day see their way clear to emancipation, but emancipation could not be forced on slaveholders without reducing them to slavery.⁵⁰

Jefferson's references to slavery illuminate the kind of rights he and his fellow Revolutionaries had in mind. Casting slaves as "murderers" of their masters, he juxtaposed the "liberties" they lost through enslavement to the lives of the planter class. Self-preservation—the first law of nature—justified "Americans" in preventing their own slaughter by perpetuating slavery and resisting imperial policies that threatened to subvert the institution. Lord Mansfield's 1772 decision in *Somerset v. Stewart*, calling into question the status of slaves as property in imperial law, shaped interpretations of subsequent British policy.⁵¹ A king who could force slaves on his unwilling subjects could also deprive slave-owners of their property and foster servile insurrection. The issue, provincial patriots finally recognized, was one of sovereignty,

both for provincial peoples collectively and for individual slaveholders and landowners. Jefferson thus concluded that the same “Christian king of Great Britain” who promoted the slave trade’s “piratical warfare,” was determined to reduce his former American subjects to slavery. George III repudiated the whole enterprise of colonization, betraying provincial Americans’ understanding of the empire and so turning their world upside down.⁵²

Provincial Americans’ self-invention as an independent “people” represented the culmination of a protracted assault on their rights by a corrupt and despotic imperial regime. The new nation was defined against counterrevolutionary enemies, the “merciless” savages, rebellious slaves, German hirelings and other tools of the king’s vengeance who threatened its annihilation. Within the limits of this exclusive, quasi-racial conception of nationhood, patriot efforts to mobilize their fellow provincials blurred traditional class and status distinctions and democratized American politics. The great sacrifices that patriots were prepared to make on behalf of their liberties would be rewarded by access to new land and new markets for enterprising producers.

Territorial expansion and the broad diffusion of power would enable Americans to avoid the ominous tendencies toward concentrated power in an unresponsive metropolis that had precipitated the imperial crisis. There would be land enough for farm and plantation-making through “the thousandth and thousandth generation,” as an exultant Jefferson promised in 1801.⁵³ Expanding economic opportunity would relieve pressure for an agrarian redistribution of property, while broadening popular political participation would sustain a regime of equal rights and so preempt the emergence of state-sanctioned hierarchy and privilege. New state-formation would replicate republican institutions across the continent, securing the legal and jurisdictional pluralism that had promoted expansion and made British America the “best poor man’s country” before the imperial crisis. This was the fundamental continuity that regime change disguised.

Ever since declaring their independence, Americans have insisted on the fundamental difference between the monarchical old regime they overthrew and the new republican nation they created. The Declaration made a world of difference, setting forth the “self-evident” republican principles that made the American experiment in republican government unique or, in contemporary language, “exceptional.” American exceptionalists then and now insist that the break with Britain was genuinely radical, rejecting traditional conceptions of hierarchy and social order and instituting a new republican order predicated on mankind’s natural rights. As they asserted the rights of the “living generation” to determine its own destiny, Jefferson and his fellow Revolutionaries overthrew the tyranny of the past. Banishing monarchy and aristocracy, Americans would no longer be held in bondage by the past’s “dead hand,” but would instead reap the benefits of self-government and secure that precious legacy to the “thousandth and thousandth generation.”⁵⁴

When Jefferson blamed George III for the slave trade and, by extension, slavery itself, he set the pattern for subsequent exceptionalists. By projecting responsibility for an acknowledged injustice, irreconcilable with the natural rights principles the Declaration espoused, Jefferson could draw a bright, clear, and redemptive line between the Old World’s pathologies and the New World’s promise. Americans could hardly deny that they depended on, and profited from, slavery, but, with Jefferson,



Figure 9.1 This anti-Jefferson satire from 1804 depicts the President as a Western prairie dog who has been fooled by the French into paying for the New Orleans territory. The print speaks to concerns about how the United States would remain unified over such a vast territory. Napoleon is depicted as a hornet stinging Jefferson, while a French diplomat dances mockingly before him. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppmsca-01659.

they could insist that their new regime was founded on principles of equal rights and government by consent that were fundamentally antithetical to the institution. Surely, as Jefferson repeatedly predicted, this evil encumbrance would ultimately and inevitably die a natural death in the land of the free. The foundational premise of American exceptionalism, the new national mythology, was newness. Whatever survived from the old imperial regime that was incompatible with the new republican dispensation was axiomatically alien and inevitably would wither away.

Jefferson and like-minded Revolutionaries were convinced that regime type both reflected and shaped the character of the people. The animating principle of monarchy was fear, the great philosopher Montesquieu taught his enlightened readers, with servile subjects cowering before their despotic master. In stark contrast, republican governments relied instead on the virtue of equal citizens, cultivating man's capacity for self-government and social cooperation.⁵⁵ In the new American republics, citizens' recognition of this capacity in their fellow citizens was a mighty bulwark against recrudescing hierarchy and privilege: virtuous Americans, vigilant in defense of their liberties, would never again submit to monarchy or aristocracy. In the same way, wartime disorders forced Americans to recognize the natural enmity and, therefore,

the humanity of their slaves. That recognition, Jefferson wrote, ultimately would subvert slavery's legitimacy. In the "quiet & monotonous course of colonial life" when Virginians still thought of themselves as subjects of George III, slaves were thought to be "as legitimate subjects of their property as their horses or cattle"⁵⁶ But independence changed everything. As whites reflected on "the value of liberty," they now saw that slaves would seize any opportunity to strike for their freedom. The patriots' shock at seeing their own love of liberty reflected in their slaves must signal slavery's ultimate demise. If slavery was "un-American," enlightened Americans would one more or less distant day find a way to free themselves from the institution's shackles.

Jefferson's great panacea for the slavery problem was emancipation and expatriation, a surgical removal of the cancerous institution from the body politic. In his visionary imagination, the "blot" or "stain" of slavery would eventually disappear. Of course, the vast majority of slaveholders—including Jefferson himself—were too heavily invested in the institution to take any immediate steps to advance this happy outcome, however much they might agree that slavery was a "necessary evil." In the meantime, silence on slavery might serve as a kind of linguistic "removal," enabling Americans to imagine themselves—in their essential character—as a slave-free people. Drawing attention to the slave trade would be counter-suggestive, underscoring the fundamental importance of slavery to the American political economy. Jefferson's indictment of George III's role in promoting the trade risked compromising the unifying and harmonizing appeal of the story his Declaration told in its opening paragraphs: the myth of a self-created free people would be subverted by divisive debates over implementing controversial policies. It was much better for Americans to emphasize the fundamental, principled difference between Old World and New, monarchy and republicanism, and look beyond the sordid details of how to accommodate the institution of slavery while waiting for enlightened republican regimes to somehow work their emancipatory magic.

Jefferson himself showed the way to look beyond—or overlook—slavery. If slaves held unjustly in bondage were a captive nation, they were by the same logic an alien people, a people without a country. "If a slave can have a country in this world," Jefferson wrote in his *Notes on Virginia*, "it must be any other in preference to that in which he is born to live and labour for another."⁵⁷ To acknowledge slaves as potential citizens was to imagine them elsewhere, anywhere but in their native country, and thus to deny any claims they might make to the land they cultivated. Jefferson could thus simultaneously acknowledge the injustice of denying enslaved Africans their freedom while imagining the American continent as "free land" rightfully possessed by prior generations of colonizing settlers. Neither slaves who lacked civic identity or capacity, nor uncivilized and barbarous indigenous peoples who lacked any conception of property rights, could make legitimate claims on the land. Most crucially, Jefferson exploded the fiction that King George III was the original and ultimate owner of all lands in his far-flung domains claims and, therefore, the proprietor of ungranted public or crown lands.

Americans' patriotism was predicated on the creation of private property claims and their collective title as a self-governing people to the continent's free land. Jefferson's celebration of the virtuously independent yeoman farmer was based on the complementary ideas that the American continent was "free" of other legitimate

claims and that Americans were a uniquely “free” people. The proliferation of freeholds in the westward waves of settlement that Jefferson conjured up in his inaugural address made slavery’s expanding empire invisible. His sanitized, republicanized image of colonization enabled Americans to cherish the myth of exceptionalism, that the Revolution constituted a fundamental break with the old imperial regime and that the American example would arouse men everywhere “to burst the chains under which monkish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves, and to assume the blessings and security of self-government.”⁵⁸ Of course, that invitation to self-government was not extended to the enslaved Americans who were nowhere to be seen in this inspiring vista. They would have to await a massive deportation to a country of their own before they could emerge from silent invisibility into their own history.

LAND OF THE FREE, HOME OF THE SLAVE

Americans’ insistence on the fundamental differences between old and new, empire and nation, barely disguised underlying continuities. When Americans claimed the right to govern themselves, they did so as a civilized, neo-European people capable of assuming an equal standing among the earth’s powers. The civilization they claimed was patently British, however much exceptionalists insisted that their new republican regime changed everything. Independence did not liberate Americans from cultural and commercial dependency on the former metropolis. But the break with Britain did give rise to a new national mythology that tended to make state power invisible. Relocating ultimate authority in the people would eliminate the pathologies of the old regime. Enthusiastic patriots could imagine that good republican citizens, secure in their equal rights and busily pursuing their own happiness, would reap the benefits of peace and prosperity. Governments would play a limited, if crucial role, in maintaining law and order and protecting citizens’ liberty. And the empire’s collapse meant that the ongoing conquest of the American wilderness would be settler-driven, spontaneous and natural.

The reality was far different, for the republican revolution led to the proliferation of increasingly legitimate and effective jurisdictions at every level of governance. Provincial governments mobilized expanding political publics and consolidated their legitimacy through the drafting, ratification, and implementation of new state constitutions; they gained added strength from a republicanized central government that perfected the union and guaranteed collective security, while preempting the dangerous consolidation of power in a distant metropolis that had driven American patriots to revolution. The genius of the new federal regime was that it was, in Brian Balogh’s striking phrase, “a government out of sight.”⁵⁹ The failure of the British Empire had been to turn periphery against center and provinces against metropolis in a massive constitutional crisis that ultimately delegitimized royal government. The “visibility” of George III’s despotism gave surviving provincial governments and the extra-constitutional infrastructure of resistance the imprimatur of legitimacy, making them seem more natural and therefore less “visible”—at least for patriots.

Revolutionary governments proceeded to make extraordinary demands on the lives and taxable property of American citizens and thus precipitated a widespread

crisis of legitimacy during the “critical period” after the Peace of Paris in 1783. But implementation of the new federal Constitution’s fiscal regime provided tax relief to the states, as Max Edling persuasively argues, and saved them from their own unruly, overtaxed citizens.⁶⁰ Antifederalist prophesies that the federal government would demolish American liberties and destroy the states gave the new regime an additional boost: the new Constitution did not establish the powerful, distant, and unresponsive metropolitan government that British reformers attempted to impose on the recalcitrant colonies. Sensitive to pervasive libertarian, anti-statist anxieties, the new regime gained legitimacy—and limited its visibility—by focusing its renewed energies outward, collecting import duties, regulating foreign commercial and diplomatic relations, pacifying the hinterland, and managing the public domain. Successive administrations understood the central importance of meeting debt obligations and sustaining public credit: indeed, redeeming the nation’s credit had been the founders’ original and overriding goal. Hamilton and Jefferson agreed that light taxes and a robust economy were crucial to national credit-worthiness and national security: when war came, the government would be able to service new debts by tapping new sources of revenue.⁶¹

The new federal government gained legitimacy through the conspicuous ways it differed from its imperial predecessor. Where British officials ruled with a heavy and increasingly ineffective hand during the imperial crisis, finally threatening to implement royal policy by force of arms, the federal government was barely visible on the waterfront and in distant frontier garrisons. The new federal city that Antifederalists feared would mushroom into a mighty, domineering metropolis, would long be a lightly populated backwater village whose very survival depended on the occasional presence of the people’s representatives.⁶² But inconspicuousness did not mean ineffectiveness. The federal government did not threaten the liberties of vigilant patriots because it so effectively worked *for* them.

The pacification and privatization of the national domain epitomized the government’s dynamic, self-effacing role: the U.S. Army’s war against the Indians precipitated a series of treaties that cleared the way for settlement, enabling the federal land office to sell off public lands rapidly to enterprising speculators, planters, and farmers. Purchasers provided the government with a stream of revenue that eventually swelled into a torrent. In exchange, agricultural producers gained secure titles, access to markets through federally and state-sponsored internal improvements, and a federal policy-making voice that grew with settlement and culminated in membership in the union. Lightly populated new states joined the union on a more than “equal” basis, with their two senators exercising disproportionate influence in the upper house. Combined with a redistribution of resources from center to periphery through heavy federal spending in frontier regions, this political premium countered the centrifugal tendencies of expanding settlement. Frontier politicians aligned themselves with national political parties, mediating between constituents and the federal administration. Commercial connections and political attachments fostered improved, federally subsidized communications through the post office and post roads.⁶³

The federal system guaranteed a dynamic circulation of power, preempting its highly visible concentration in any incipient metropolis. What was most striking about the new regime was the conspicuous presence of distant territories and new

states at the federal center. Power was not only broadly diffused but constantly in motion, thus enabling Americans to collapse distances and sustain attachments across the expanding federal republic.⁶⁴ This was the most important difference between the old imperial regime and its republican successor. Emerging from a great war for empire carried on at enormous expense, British reformers had assumed that efficient, consolidated administration was essential to upholding the king's authority across his far-flung dominions. The temptation they could not resist was to treat their provincial cousins as subjects of more effective governance—and as sources of revenue—and to dismiss their outraged claims to equal rights, so calling into question a common, greater British national identity.

American patriots sought a constitutional settlement that would secure provincial liberties and guarantee their continuing role as agents of empire. Far from signaling a determination to break with the empire, negotiating a more perfect imperial union would reinforce their loyalty to the king. The settlement they so desperately sought and that the imperial government so obdurately opposed anticipated the federal Constitution of 1787. That settlement harked back to the British Empire as American patriots imagined it before 1763, when misguided imperial policies began to demolish the customary constitution that had for so long sustained a working balance between center and periphery to the benefit of both. The great difference was that a new and dynamic federal balance was consciously constructed and explicitly articulated in the new federal Constitution. Delegations from the respective province-states created a new union—or empire—without a metropolis, turning the empire immanent in British policy inside out. But the triumph of the expanding periphery did not mean that the government of the federal union would be weak or the loyalties of Americans tenuous. Colonial Americans had always acknowledged and depended on the empire for collective security, commercial regulation, and rule of law, and these were key components of the new federal system. Now Americans would tax themselves (as lightly as possible) for these great boons, confident that the new regime would not encroach on the rights of their states, the integrity of their legal systems, and the civil liberties of their citizens.

The founders' "more perfect union" fulfilled the frustrated ambitions of Anglo-American imperialists, reviving and sustaining the great colonization project that British policies threatened to abort.⁶⁵ Ratification was a triumph for the equal rights of colony-state republics, creating a "slaveholders' union" that legitimized the autonomous jurisdictions—and the slave codes—that originally underwrote imperial expansion.⁶⁶ According to the patriots' master narrative, independence signaled a fundamental break between the slavery that threatened American subjects under the imperial old regime, and the freedom that the new republican regime promised its self-proclaimed citizens. But if revolutionary mobilization unleashed the equality principle and democratized political life within the new states, it also reinforced the boundary between self-empowered citizens and their enslaved subjects, thus illuminating a more fundamental continuity between old regime and new. Citizens mobilized to defend their slave property as well as their liberties. Recognition of the equal rights of state-republics, including the newly formed states that would gain membership in an expanding union, fostered the spread of slavery.

The colonizers' vision of empire merged with American exceptionalist ideology in what became known as "manifest destiny." Expansionist impulses were harnessed

to an ideological commitment to model and promote universal principles of equal rights and republican self-government. The many meanings of equality were collapsed into the democracy Tocqueville encountered during his travels across the new nation. Amazed that the new nation did not descend into anarchy and that the leveling spirit did not lead to despotism and slavery, the French visitor looked for new sources of order and protections for liberty in the new nation's pervasively and profoundly democratic culture. For all the brilliance of his insights into the inner workings of mass society, however, Tocqueville failed to recognize the role of state power in sustaining the democratic experiment. Taking his cue from his informants as well as from the apparent invisibility of government, Tocqueville attributed the extraordinary orderliness of American society to the genius of the people. But it was the federal state's genius to make itself inconspicuous and so to foster the illusion that the people, pursuing their own happiness, made America.⁶⁷ As Tocqueville recognized in his extended meditation on the fate of the "three races," Americans exercised their collective power, through government, to displace Indians and perpetuate slavery. From the outside looking in—and from across the racial divide—Jefferson's claim in his first inaugural address that the United States had the "strongest Government on earth" seems less absurd, more prophetic. The federal government would transform the vast western hinterland into "free" land for succeeding generations of enterprising farmers and planters. And, of course, this "empire for liberty" would also be an "empire for slavery."

The juxtaposition of liberty and slavery is jarring to modern sensibilities. Yet slaveowners in the vanguard of imperial and republican expansion were unconscious of contradiction. They did not hesitate to call on the power of the federal union to protect them from external threats even as they insisted on the sanctity of states' rights. Former president John Quincy Adams and other exponents of tariff protection for northern manufactures were outraged at the southerners' double standard: they could see clearly how the "slave power" used the federal government to promote sectional interests. "It is the superabundantly, the excessively protected interest of the south," Adams complained in 1833, "which revolts at the feeble and scanty protection of the laws enjoyed by the north, the centre, and the west." Southerners commanded the protection of a powerful central government, both to remove Indians from the path of plantation development and to secure slavery. Yet, at the same time, they saw the union which guaranteed their vital interests as a mere "partnership of corporate bodies" to which they owed nothing in return.⁶⁸ Adams's sense of betrayal reflected an ominous fracturing of the colonizers' consensus that had animated American patriots in the imperial crisis. Jefferson had warned, in the wake of the controversy over Missouri's admission to the union, that a "geographical line, coinciding with a marked principle, moral and political" now divided Americans. "Once conceived and held up to the angry passions of men," that line "will never be obliterated."⁶⁹

In the decades leading up to the Civil War, northerners and southerners would quarrel over who was more faithful to the legacy of the Revolutionary fathers. Adams and a growing chorus of moralizing northerners insisted that the institution of slavery negated the Revolutionaries' fundamental commitment to human equality that Jefferson had so eloquently articulated in the Declaration: it was a cancer on the body politic that must be contained and eventually eliminated. If the expansion of

the union spread the cancer, then expansion itself must be stopped. For southerners, the threat that a distant and unresponsive central government might curb the settlement of new territory and creation of new states evoked the crisis that had precipitated the war for independence. Slavery was essential to the expansion of the union the Revolutionaries originally envisioned, and the vitality of the institution depended on its continuing expansion. Northerners' assault on the equal rights of slaveowners and slave states in the territories thus jeopardized the "peculiar institution" where it was already established, leading southern patriots to declare their own independence. "There is not a slaveholder in the House or out of it," a Georgia congressman told his colleagues in 1856, "but who knows perfectly well that, whenever slavery is confined within certain specified limits its existence is doomed; it is only a question of time as to its final destruction."⁷⁰

Southerners celebrated the central role of slavery in the history of Anglo-American territorial expansion, thus acknowledging the fundamental continuity between old regime and new, empire and nation, that the American Revolutionaries—the first exceptionalists—had sought to suppress. Hypocritical Britons had betrayed their own empire in 1776, just as hypocritical northerners now turned against the slave south. Slaveholding southerners insisted that the continuing progress of colonization was a good thing, generating wealth for the nation and the world, sustaining the liberties of white citizens, and providing for the welfare and happiness of slaves themselves.⁷¹

Proslavery ideologists thought of themselves as good Americans who were faithful to Revolutionary principles, shorn of what they—and many contemporaries throughout the western world—considered nonsensical claims about human equality and universal rights.⁷² The Revolutionaries had imagined the eventual disappearance of slavery, thus distancing the new nation's founding principles and collective self-understanding from this temporarily "necessary evil."⁷³ Southern exponents of slavery gradually moved toward "positive good" arguments, recognizing that the institution was not only a permanent fixture of their societies, but was foundational to the nation's future greatness. At the same time, ameliorating slaveholders claimed that the institution of slavery was subject to improvement. As conditions for slaves improved, the danger of servile insurrection progressively diminished.⁷⁴

If slaves collectively constituted a captive nation—the people without a country that Jefferson conjured up in his *Notes on Virginia*—individual slaves and their families were absorbed into their masters' households. With slavery's "domestication," slaves' latent civic identity, glimpsed by fearful masters in the wartime disruptions of the Revolution and War of 1812, was completely erased. Slaves were simultaneously ubiquitous, woven into the very fabric of southern slave societies, and invisible, protected from the candid world's prying eyes by family values and their masters' right to privacy. Slaves might never have their own country, but they would have a "home" in the "land of the free."

Slaves' social death and civic invisibility helped make the early American federal state *seem* invisible, just as—and not coincidentally—Indians vanished and waves of settlement washed westward, as if by some natural force. But of course, as their masters well knew, slaves were made property by law and were kept in bondage by the coercive power of the state: there were no slaves in the "state of nature." So, too, the state made the land "free" by displacing Indians and making that land

available—at a price—to enterprising settlers, guaranteeing their legal titles and protecting them from counter-claimants. These were all the fruits of a long and continuous process of colonization, enabled by the technology of law through the replication of jurisdictions. Colonization made European settlers “American,” providing them with the institutional and ideological legacies that fostered their capacity for governing themselves and for subjecting other peoples to their governance.⁷⁵

NOTES

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- 2 On colonial Americans monarchical attachments, see Brendan McConville, *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688–1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
- 3 On the protection covenant, see James Kettner, *The Development of American Citizenship, 1608–1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 165–72. See also the essays in Peter Thompson and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *State and Citizen: British America and the Early United States* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013).
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- 5 Lincoln wrote: “we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” Gettysburg Address, Gettysburg Address (Final Text), Nov. 19, 1863, in Roy Basler, ed., *The Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953–55), 7:23.
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- 7 David Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003).
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- 10 TJ to Roger C. Weightman, June 24, 1826, in Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Thomas Jefferson Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1517.
- 11 Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776 (TJ draft), *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition*, ed. Oberg and Looney, Canonic URL: <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/TSJN-01-01-02-0160> [accessed 30 Dec 2012]. For a comprehensive review of the Anglicization theme, see Andrew Shankman, “A Synthesis Useful and Compelling: Anglicization and the Achievement of John M. Murrin,” in Ignacio Gallup-Díaz, Andrew Shankman, and David Silverman eds., *Anglicizing Americans: Empire, Revolution, Republic* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).
- 12 The title of this chapter is borrowed from John M. Murrin, “In the Land of the Free and the Homes of the Slave, Maybe there was Room Even for Deference,” *Journal of American History* 85 (1998), 86–91. My discussion is indebted to Christopher Tomlins, *Freedom Bound: Law, Labor, and Civic Identity in Colonizing English America, 1580–1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

- 13 Jack P. Greene, *The Constitutional Origins of the American Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Greene, *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States, 1607–1788* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).
- 14 Peter Onuf and Nicholas Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolution, 1776–1814* (Madison, WI: Madison House, 1990), 108–13.
- 15 Jack P. Greene, *Evaluating and Confronting Colonialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- 16 J.M. Bumsted, “‘Things in the Womb of Time’: Ideas of American Independence, 1633 to 1763,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 31 (1974), 533–64.
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- 18 Sam W. Haynes, *Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World* (Charlottesville, 2010). My understanding of Anglo-American relations in the 19th century is indebted to Jay Sexton’s superb new synthesis, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011). For further discussion of British imperial history, including the postcolonial United States, see the essays collected in Jack P. Greene, ed., *Exclusionary Empire: English Liberty Overseas, 1600–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). See also Bernard Semmel, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism; Classical Political Economy, The Empire of Free Trade and Imperialism 1750–1850* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
- 19 Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776 (TJ draft), *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition*, ed. Oberg and Looney.
- 20 TJ, Draft of Instructions to the Virginia Delegates in the Constitutional Convention (ms. text of *The Summary View of the Rights of British America* [July 1774]), *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition*, ed. Oberg and Looney, Canonic URL: <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/TSJN-01-01-02-0090> [accessed 01 Jan 2013].
- 21 Onuf and Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World*, 10–19.
- 22 James R. Hrdlicka, “War and Constitution-Making in Revolutionary Massachusetts, 1754–1788” (Ph.D. dissertation in progress, University of Virginia).
- 23 TJ to Joseph C. Cabell, Feb. 2, 1816, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson Writings*, 1380. For further discussion see Peter S. Onuf, “Thomas Jefferson and American Democracy,” in Francis D. Cogliano, ed., *A Companion to Thomas Jefferson* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 397–418.
- 24 TJ to Joseph C. Cabell, Feb. 2, 1816, in Peterson, ed., *Thomas Jefferson Writings*, 1380.
- 25 De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Library of America, 2004), 3. That power, in its most destructive form, was manifest in the French Revolution. See David Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007).
- 26 John Locke, *Two Treatise of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1960). On conjectural history, see Onuf and Onuf, *Nations, Markets, and War*, 42–48.
- 27 Jefferson’s “original Rough draught” of the Declaration of Independence [June 11–July 4, 1776], in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition*, ed. Oberg and Looney, Canonic URL: <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/TSJN-01-01-02-0176-0004> [accessed 01 Jan 2013]. In the final draft “those rights” replaced “these ends.”

- 28 Minutes of the Board of Visitors, March 4, 1825, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson Writings*, 479.
- 29 Ari Helo and Peter Onuf, “Jefferson, Morality, and the Problem of Slavery,” *William and Mary Quarterly* LX (2003), 583–614.
- 30 Armin Mattes, *Citizens of a Common Intellectual Homeland: The Transatlantic Context of the Origins of American Democracy and Nationhood, 1775–1840* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, forthcoming). See also R. R. Palmer’s magisterial narrative, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959–1964).
- 31 For a full elaboration of this argument, see Patrick Griffin, *America’s Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 32 Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, in Moncure Conway, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, 4 vols. (New York, 1894), vol. 1, http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=343&chapter=17027&layout=html&Itemid=27.
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- 34 TJ, *Summary View, Papers of Jefferson Digital Edition*, ed. Oberg and Looney. See the excellent discussion in Brian Steele, *Thomas Jefferson and American Nationhood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 21–37.
- 35 *The Letters of Governor Hutchinson, and Lieut. Governor Oliver, &c. Printed at Boston. And Remarks Thereon* (London, 1774), Jan. 20, 1769, 16–17.
- 36 Michal Rozbicki, *Culture and Liberty in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011). See also the forum on Rozbicki’s book in *Historically Speaking* 13 (April 2012), 8–20. For a complementary account, focusing on how ordinary colonists could exercise their traditional liberties in public life, see Barbara Clark Smith, *The Freedoms We Have Lost: Consent and Resistance in Revolutionary America* (New York: Free Press, 2010).
- 37 TJ, *Summary View, Papers of Jefferson Digital Edition*, ed. Oberg and Looney.
- 38 Samuel Johnson, *Taxation, no Tyranny*, in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. 10 of *Political Writings*, ed. Donald J. Greene (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 10: 454. See the discussion in Eliga Gould, “The Laws of War and Peace: Legitimizing Slavery in the Age of the American Revolution,” in Thompson and Onuf, eds., *State and Citizen*, 52–76.
- 39 My argument is indebted to Holly Brewer’s “Subject by Allegiance to the King? Debating Status and Power for Subjects—and Slaves—through the Religious Debates of the Early British Atlantic,” in Thompson and Onuf, eds., *State and Citizen*, 25–51.
- 40 Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954), Query XVIII (“Manners”), 163.
- 41 Tomlins, *Freedom Bound*.
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- 43 The Declaration as Adopted by Congress, July 4, 1776, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition*, ed. Oberg and Looney, Canonic URL: <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/TSJN-01-01-02-0176-0006> [accessed 11 Jan 2013].
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- 46 TJ, *Autobiography* (1821), in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson Writings*, 18.
- 47 TJ, *Summary View, Papers of Jefferson Digital Edition*, ed. Oberg and Looney.

- 48 Tomlins, *Freedom Bound*.
- 49 TJ, “original Rough draught” of the Declaration [June 11–July 4, 1776], *Papers of Jefferson Digital Edition*, ed. Oberg and Looney.
- 50 For further discussion of this point, see Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire*, 147–88.
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- 73 Nicholas Wood, “Questions of Humanity and Expediency: The Slave Trades and African Colonization in American Politics, 1789–1840” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2013).
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- 75 This theme is brilliantly developed in Eliza Gould’s *Among the Powers of the Earth*.

CHAPTER TEN

ATLANTIC ANTISLAVERY, AMERICAN ABOLITION

The Problem of Slavery in the United States in an Age of Disruption, 1770–1808



James Alexander (Alec) Dun

The legacy of the American Revolution for slavery in the United States was formed and reformed in the years and decades after the fighting stopped. Even the American Civil War, despite the elegiac appeals of Abraham Lincoln, could not definitively establish the relationship between the nation's founding and the institution's fate. The source of this indeterminacy is basic to history itself. Lincoln's "mystic chords of memory" could sound differently in different ears. Looking back, different Americans could (and would) rest on different aspects of the Revolution, connecting it to their present ends, some opportunistically, some cynically, some with reverence.

Legacy, of course, is distinct from impact. The immediate consequences of the Revolutionary conflict can be charted and listed. The War had disrupted slavery's workings, shaken its presumptions, and, in places, compromised its existence. Thousands of African-Americans had taken advantage of the tumult in ways that changed their condition, sometimes drastically. As many as 30,000 served with the British forces, about a third of whom as soldiers. Many departed with the British armies when they evacuated, beginning new lives in London, Canada, Sierra Leone, or New South Wales. Others remained, forming enclaves and communities wherever they could. In this they joined with the efforts of those free and freed blacks, mostly in New England, who had fought with the patriots during the conflict. Furthermore, the physical destruction of the War was significant in areas where slaveholding predominated, in no small part because of the British tactical decision to move the fight to the South in the hopes of undercutting the rebellion by sapping its support among slave owners.¹

Though crops were burnt and slaves were lost, American slavery endured in those places where it had been important before the War and continued to decline in those places where it was not. As Trevor Burnard has argued, the establishment of the United States did not constitute a rupture in slavery's evolution in the hemisphere. Both South Carolina and Jamaica engaged in massive slave importations after the War ended, while slavery remained marginal in British Canada and the New England states.² The institution was fundamentally an economic entity, a system of marshaling and controlling labor that, by the late eighteenth century, existed along a spectrum

of labor statuses, many of which involved degrees of unfreedom.³ The existence of the American polity would have little immediate impact on the trajectory taken by an ancient institution as it evolved in a modernizing world.⁴

And yet, even before the War began, participants and observers around the Atlantic conceived of the conflict as one that would have implications for that institution. Because its growth and transformation had been bound up with the development of the Americas and the imperial competition that sought to organize them, slavery was constitutive of Euro-American identity and political culture. Because slavery had evolved over time, hardening by the eighteenth century from a squishy status into a racially determined, permanent, and hereditary state, it cropped up when Britons talked about the freedoms and rights they felt distinguished them from other Europeans. Because it was fundamentally a colonial institution, it arose when Americans talked about the nature of their homelands as compared to the metropolis, and it figured in debates over the relationship between colonial and imperial laws. Because its presence and centrality varied geographically, it arose in discussions over the different roles played by different colonies and their respective weight and contributions. The institution of slavery was a system of labor, but it was also a locus of ideological expression. As the Anglo-American crisis heightened in the late 1760s and early 1770s, slavery would provide some Whig polemicists with a way to put meat on their arguments about the meaning of their struggle; in the process it would offer a way to conceptualize and sharpen radical Enlightenment ideals about freedom, liberty, and civic rights.⁵

At the same time, the rhetorical nature of the Whig turn opened Americans up to metropolitan charges of hypocrisy. Dr. Samuel Johnson's jibe that the loudest "yelps for liberty" came from the American "drivers of negroes" is representative of a more general strain of response on the part of British critics of the colonial protests, one that imagined imperial reforms that would recognize all British subjects, black and white, as having some rights.⁶ Christopher Brown has shown that this impulse led some Britons to conceptualize the empire as a place of incorporation without regard to race and energized others to organize abolitionist campaigns.⁷ During the War it took on real force in the hands of military commanders when they haltingly accepted the flight of their enemies' slaves to their lines. When the War was over, those American colonies that remained British bore the mark of this experience. British Canadians, and the American loyalists among them, were involved in the Sierra Leone project. The planters of the Caribbean, meanwhile, found themselves less able to fend off abolitionist critiques and campaigns by arguing for their local rights and privileges, problems that their South Carolinian and Georgian cousins did not have.

The ideological content of the American Revolutionary era, in other words, can reasonably be understood as producing only a shallow or ephemeral impact on American slavery. Though championing the ideals of liberty and equality led some to question the institution, that challenge withered in the face of the right to property. The politics behind the federal compact ensured that (white) minority interests would be protected within the Union. The structure of the Constitution, while it made the balance between national and local power "more perfect" by expanding the federal purview, left significant power in the hands of slaveholders and the states they controlled. As a result, slavery would have a variegated fate across the nation,

according to its economic value. In New England, where it was marginal, it was abolished with relative ease. In the lower South, where it was the centerpiece of the plantation economy, it was not. The places in between, the Chesapeake and mid-Atlantic regions, teetered between these results. In the Chesapeake slavery was questioned, but endured. Though Pennsylvania would begin a process of emancipation in 1780, New York (1799) and New Jersey (1804) would take considerably longer. By this understanding, the American Revolution ultimately preserved slavery, both in reality and as an issue of difference that Lincoln would come to argue about down the road.⁸

While this interpretation is convincing, there are reasons to focus on the legacy of the Revolution for slavery—on the ongoing attempts to determine its implications and meaning—as part of the context for its ultimately limited impact. If American independence failed to immediately eradicate slavery, many did expect it to do so. As Susan Buck-Morss has noted, “if the American Revolution could not solve the problem of slavery, it at least led to a *perception* of the problem.”⁹ Examining the logic behind these expectations and perceptions, for one, maintains a sense of the dynamism of the Revolutionary moment. For all of their limitations in practice, the ideals of the Revolution inspired many to new heights of activity. Their shortfalls reveal countervailing forces, but they also help illuminate the factors that gave those forces weight. In taking the Revolutionary promise seriously, we can better appreciate the fluidity of the moment, and better identify the contingencies that shaped its faltering. In so doing, we avoid treating Revolutionary ideology as fully determined, either being a transcendent force that would ultimately be borne out (say, by the Emancipation Proclamation, or the Civil Rights Act) or an idea system riddled with innate contradictions. Instead, by embracing the unfolding process in this way, we see a Revolution in the making.

This approach tends to expand the categories of actors and activities that we consider germane as markers of change. As Douglas Egerton, Gary Nash, and Cassandra Pybus have recently reminded, the slaves and people of color who flocked to the British were enacting their own opposition to slavery. Taking advantage of the conflict, they found opportunities to act to their own ends.¹⁰ Their words and deeds constituted a separate, but related, brand of antislavery from that of the patriot Revolutionaries, one that laid bare the fallacy of the chattel principle that undergirded the institution and resisted any sense that slavery was part of a natural order. This sort of resistance was endemic to slavery, of course. Enslaved people contradicted the core assumption behind their status every time they named their own children, reinterpreted Christian teachings, or buried their dead—in short, every time they expressed their individual or collective will. At times, that expression would constitute overt resistance, through open violence or exodus. More often, given the awesome coercive structures slavery imposed on their lives, it would not.¹¹ The Revolutionary crisis jolted those structures, opening up spaces for acts and assertions that would not have been possible without it. Just as it prompted imperial thinkers to reconsider the nature of the empire, the tumult on the ground produced counter-authorities in places like Williamsburg and Savannah that slaves could utilize to act on their own behalf. It also did so in Boston, where free blacks petitioned both royal authorities and local representatives for redress in the early 1770s.¹² Some even offered General Thomas Gage their services as soldiers against the patriot militias

in exchange for their freedom, an effort Abigail Adams described as a “conspiracy of the Negroes,” even as she admitted that slavery exposed an “iniquitous Scheme” within the American cause, to “fight ourselves [sic] for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have.”¹³

Adams’s reaction encapsulates another benefit of focusing on the promise and potential of Revolutionary-era antislavery. In her hurried letter, the description of the “conspiracy” in Boston was the sole piece of detailed news she provided her husband John in Philadelphia. The disruptions of the War permitted both antislavery acts and ideas about abolition. The efforts of African-Americans sparked contemplation about the nature of the conflict among white Americans. As opposed to specific grievances against Parliament, discussing the colonial plight in relation to slavery—either their own figurative oppression or the literal institution—demanded that the “cause” be taken on universal terms and therefore taken as relevant outside the specific context of a provincial tax revolt. Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* made this point most forcibly in 1776, though the first writing he produced upon arriving in Philadelphia in that year was a pamphlet skewering slavery as a barbarous vestige that had no place in the Enlightened world.¹⁴ The Declaration of Independence, though first and foremost a justification (and demonstration) of independence, similarly linked radical Enlightenment “rights talk” to an opposition to slavery.¹⁵ These sorts of arguments were an avenue by which extant currents of antislavery sentiment—the spiritual equality preached by New Light Presbyterians, reforming Quakers, and Moravians—were provided political traction. Strained through the Revolutionary crisis, these transatlantic religious movements were connected to the national project. For those who continued to ruminate on the issue, the cause at hand was not simply independence, but a reformulation of society in which the newly United States was to be a specific expression of universal principles.¹⁶

Seen in this light, the main immediate impact made by the War on the institution of slavery was to disrupt it, to unsettle its workings and to call into question its presumptions. The physical disruption of the War—the chaos of the fighting and the destruction it wrought—however, also served to quash discussion of the issue for a time, at least among whites.¹⁷ Once the nation was established, those discussions reemerged, beginning more than a decade of debate, discussion, and disagreement about the nature of the Revolution and the polity it had produced. This is the “Revolutionary era” that this chapter will now explore, one in which the legacy of the Revolution was being contested in real time. If the War itself had proved to be a disruption, this was an age of disruption, a time when the fluidity of meaning mentioned above was at its most active. In this period, while some of the forces pushing against slavery remained constant, important new stimuli were also factors. The British Army, once a source of tumult and opportunity, was no longer a presence. The appeal of British reform efforts, while noted by American activists, was complicated politically by the fact of independence. Both white and black activists, continuing the line of reasoning begun in the 1770s, placed the American nation into this void. Changing only the tense of the verbs used, they argued that the new nation should now become the antislavery republic that the ideals of the Revolutionary struggle, properly understood, had heralded. Making such claims fit well with the postwar environment in which the great majority of white Americans celebrated their accomplishment as an important, even millennial, moment in the advance of human freedom.

The universalism grounding those claims made their connection to Revolutionary France inescapable. French events after 1789 fundamentally shaped the disruptions Americans would feel and react to in this period, and they would condition the ways in which American antislavery formed and functioned. From the American perspective, French developments were more than simply interesting or inspirational, they were profoundly revelatory. Initially the news from France sparked widespread celebrations among citizens and statesmen alike, as Americans looked there and welcomed the unraveling of the Old Regime as a parallel to their own independence: yet another blow had been struck against unwarranted authority; power had been transferred from a king and his acolytes to the people. Lafayette and Thomas Paine sent George Washington a set of keys to the Bastille to mark the moment.¹⁸ This sensibility reached a height in 1792, when France established itself as a republic. Americans encountered France as a point of comparison, one that for many led to a calibration of the balance between the features of American identity that were particular to the nation, and those that were expressions of wider, even universal, truths.¹⁹ In this context, the Revolutionary rights talk of the 1770s reemerged with new life and power in American political discourse.

The comparison that Americans made, however, did not simply stem from ruminations about government. Information from France could take six weeks to arrive in the United States, and then most often came via an increasingly hostile British press. A far more ready source of French happenings was the Caribbean. The French colonies there had become vibrant trading partners for American merchants during and after the war for independence. In addition to sugar and coffee, merchant vessels brought back French news.²⁰ This included tales of metropolitan events, but also of developments in the colonies themselves. The French Revolution that Americans came to know and think about was inflected by this West Indian lens.

In turning to the Caribbean as a source of global news, Americans were engaging with a region they saw as at once resonant and distinct. The British West Indian colonies had become counterpoints in North American colonial discourse during the Revolutionary crises. Benjamin Franklin and others contrasted the mainland colonies' value to the Empire with that of the sugar islands. Despite the reality of North American slavery and the intertwined relationship between the Caribbean and the New England and mid-Atlantic colonies, the West Indies emerged as an opposite to the emergent United States in this discourse, a place of degeneracy, dissolution, and danger.²¹ Once independence was established, Americans wondered if other colonies would follow in their path. Revolution, in this frame, was an anti-imperial development, one that grew from rational understandings of commercial interests. As the French Revolution reverberated through the French West Indies, Americans saw signs that that Revolution—one that they also connected to the news from Paris—was at hand. To the Bastille's keys one might have added a hogshead of sugar from Guadeloupe or a barrel of Pennsylvanian flour; liberty and freedom (to trade) seemed to go hand in hand.

Americans well knew, however, that the sugar they exchanged for their flour was "stained with spots of human blood" shed by the slaves that West Indian planters used to produce it.²² In establishing the Caribbean as a canvas upon which they could paint an oppositional image of their own polity, Americans tended to underplay, or even elide altogether, slavery's role as a constitutive part of their own national

identity. French Revolutionary developments furthered this sense that American freedom involved a negation of Caribbean slavery. The empire's colonial jewel, Saint Domingue, was home to a significant population of free people of color who, as the colony's plantation economy flourished, had experienced increasing discrimination. The changes in France offered new opportunities to resist this development, including the formation of the *Amis des Noirs*, a group interested in colonial reform and racial equality. This struggle became violent in early 1790, when free colored forces attempted to force their claims for inclusion, a fleeting effort that nevertheless sparked further debate over the colonial question in Paris: would the changes at the center be applied universally across the empire? Americans took this all in, feeling their way through the various factional fighting in the hopes of identifying which were representatives of the Revolutionary regime, and which were its opponents. The task grew more difficult, and more riveting, after August 22, 1791, when thousands of slaves in Saint Domingue's North Province rose in rebellion.²³

While very few white Americans would react with anything but horror as the insurrection grew and others broke out, all understood the chaos as directly related to the Revolution in France. By mid-1792, hundreds of thousands of Africans and Afro-Caribbeans had effectively upended slavery across wide swaths of the colony, and free people of color had taken advantage of the tumult to secure local recognition of their equal rights as colonial citizens. Americans read detailed, if sometimes fuzzy, accounts of these developments in their newspapers, alongside news of the increasingly radical tenor of events in France. Pushed by colonial events, the National Convention declared all free citizens to have equal rights in April of that year, effectively answering the colonial question by asserting that the Revolution's ruling principles would apply to the social order everywhere. The Revolution would follow a similar trajectory with regard to emancipation. On February 4, 1794, the Convention declared that slavery would be immediately abolished across the French empire. That edict, however, was an affirmation of measures taken on the ground in Saint Domingue beginning in the middle of 1793, when beleaguered republican officials had been forced to offer freedom to the insurgents in order to stave off defeat at the hands of their white rivals in the colony.²⁴ In addition to the declaration of the French Republic, Americans took all of this in context of the trial and execution of Louis XVI and the outbreak of war against France across Europe. They witnessed the rise of the Gironde faction, whose leadership produced the public declaration of republican revolution as a universal right, as well as their fall from power and the beginnings of the violence of the Terror, with its governmental purges, anti-Christian campaigns, and provincial rebellions.²⁵ These developments were the subject of ardent attention and endless debate among American audiences, who saw them as markers of important global shifts. Americans might differ over what exactly those shifts represented, but the sense that they were vital was pervasive.²⁶

The disruptions caused in America by these events were profound, in some respects on par with those experienced during the war for independence. Recent histories of the early national period have emphasized the fears and anxieties that coursed through it as Americans strove to translate the ideals of Revolution into the pragmatics of statecraft. The fractiousness that emerged in the process was alarming; disparity was more than a signal of divergent opinions, it was a cause for despair and for some even constituted a sign that treason was afoot. Given the importance attached to

the French Revolution, and given the dramatic, West-Indian-infused tack taken by its politics, the power of Francophilia and Francophobia in organizing this political culture is not surprising.²⁷ The political discourse by which that culture developed, once dismissed as hyperbole or paranoia, reflected intense differences and burgeoning divisions that, over time, would cohere into opposing groups. That process was an evolution, however, not a clear-cut application of antithetical principles.

The events in France and the French West Indies ensured that the issue of slavery would become one of its flashpoints. The violence in Saint Domingue, first among white factions, then that involving the free coloreds, the insurgent slaves, and finally the seemingly anarchic *mélange* that consumed the social order in the colony, reverberated through Americans' imaginations, as well as their ruminations over the future of the institution. By mid-1793, that violence had produced more tangible results in the form of the approximately 10,000 white and black refugees who fled the colony, many of whom landing along the American coast.²⁸ Finally, the Anglo-French war, and the mission of the Girondist diplomat Edmond Genet, brought the question of the United States' position in the global revolution to a head. Genet was charged with bringing the United States into the French orbit, both against Britain, but also in the name of affiliating republicanism globally.²⁹ When the Washington administration thwarted these aims and declared American neutrality, Genet threatened to "appeal to the People" in order to get around what he saw as counter-revolutionary obstructionism. Neutrality, in Genet's view, revealed the true colors—the "aristocratic" tendencies—of Washington's cadre, qualities he also saw in the West Indian *émigrés*. Defenders of the administration countered by offering a different picture of the American polity, one that had successfully transferred sovereignty to the people, a conception that related the French and American Revolutions through the common commitment to extending the rights of man that underlay them both. By this understanding, Genet, while he may have gone too far, was the embodiment of republican principles that knew no national boundaries. "All the old spirit of 1776 is rekindling," Thomas Jefferson wrote in mid-1793, "even the Monocrat papers are obliged to publish the most furious Philippics against England."³⁰

Jefferson's construction is telling. He described a Revolutionary fire that had been reduced to coals, but was now beginning again to blaze, a Revolution that was unfinished—whose legacy was still in formation. Among American abolitionists—white activists organizing and promoting plans for emancipation—this environment contributed to a wave of optimism and activity. During and immediately after the American War, the New England states and Pennsylvania had acted to end slavery. The forms this took were a mixed bag. In Vermont and Massachusetts, the institution was excised completely through appeals to their foundational ideal of the equality of man, a case made either by white legislators or African-Americans in the courts. In Pennsylvania, the disruptions of War reshuffled the dynamics of power, allowing a coalition of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians from the western part of the state and urban populists (led by Thomas Paine) to cobble together support for an emancipation bill through arguments that combined pragmatic notices of slavery's inefficiency (and of the dangers another British invasion might bring should it be maintained) with patriotic and Christian appeals. The resulting act, passed on March 1, 1780, reflected the influence of slaveholding interests. Only slaves born after it was

passed were to be freed, and they only after a lengthy period of bound service. This was the model followed in Rhode Island and Connecticut, as well.³¹

These limits notwithstanding, the preamble to the Pennsylvanian act reminded that slavery was a British imposition and defined its absence as American, or at least Pennsylvanian. The same motive revived Pennsylvanian antislavery activists, leading them to reorganize as an Abolition Society and to expand their goals to include the ending of slavery in the nation altogether. Their efforts were predicated on a Revolutionary conception of universal human equality, an earnest desire to ensure that the nascent United States would become an antislavery republic, and a hopeful sense that the moment was ripe for successful action. The Society's optimism came from the combination of its approach to the American past and its regard of the global present. Viewing the American Revolution as but the first step in a worldwide movement to end the tyranny of slavery everywhere, the Society accepted as members any who wished "to extend the blessings of Freedom to every part of the human race." Barring only slave owners, they immediately added a number of British and French luminaries to their membership lists. "The present age has been distinguished by a remarkable Revolution," the Society wrote to Lafayette in what was a typical exchange, "mankind begin at last to consider themselves as Members of one family."³²

This hopefulness was rooted in the sense that there was more to do. Pennsylvania's gradualism, for example, though unprecedented, disappointed some activists. "What!" Amis des Noirs leader Jacques-Pierre Brissot wrote after visiting the state in 1788 and stating his intention to bring the Society's principles to bear in France, "the child of a Negro slave in Pennsylvania can hope to enjoy liberty some day and his master cannot withhold it from him . . . yet the unhappy father of this child is forever deprived of his freedom!" For French and British activists, however, the partial nature of this approach was more a sign that change had begun than a marker of its limits. Brissot, who would lead the Gironde until his death at the guillotine, understood the United States as a herald of the future. "Americans are, more than any other nation, convinced that all men are born free and equal," he wrote, "*The nature of the land here is opposed to slavery.*"³³

Fueled by this sentiment, American activists pushed to speed emancipation where it was gradual and to expand their presence into areas where it had not yet begun. Between 1788 and 1793, the Pennsylvania Society connected with activists in Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia, as well as in London and Paris, a fact that led its leadership to forecast the "near approach" of a "happy aera" of the "General Emancipation of the slaves" in the United States.³⁴ The establishment of new societies produced a sense of crescendo, especially as signs appeared to suggest the spread of antislavery sentiment into Southern states.³⁵ With the founding of the New Jersey Abolition Society in February 1793, the Pennsylvania Society president would tout the existence of an abolitionist "chain" that stretched nearly across the nation.³⁶ Plans for emancipation proliferated and were publicized in journals that were meant to speak to, and for, a national audience. Between late 1789 and 1792, an effort to replace slave-grown sugar with maple sugar, an "AMERICAN SUGAR" provided by Providence to the nation to speed slavery's end, was discussed, promoted, and haltingly implemented.³⁷ "A SCHEME for the GRADUAL ABOLITION of SLAVERY" in Maryland was proposed in late 1790

that recommended the use of a state lottery to compensate owners.³⁸ Late in 1790, Ferdinando Fairfax of Richmond, Virginia offered a “Plan for Liberating the Negroes in the United States” that proposed giving Congress a large role in adjudicating the thorny issue.³⁹ In 1793, leaders in New York and Pennsylvania advanced the idea of bringing representatives from all American antislavery societies together at a single central meeting. The resulting “Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies Established in different Parts of the United States” would convene on January 1, 1794, beginning a series of annual meetings that would continue, albeit with some interruptions, into the early decades of the nineteenth century. “The time is rapidly approaching when the citizens of these United States will no longer merit the odious character of *oppressors of their fellow men*,” one group of abolitionists wrote, “but, by nobly breaking the chains of slavery, justly entitle their country to the name of *THE LAND OF LIBERTY*.”⁴⁰

Differences emerged among the various visions of that land. Representatives from South Carolina and Georgia rejected it altogether when the Society brought a petition to Congress in 1790.⁴¹ Fairfax proposed that freed blacks be removed to Africa, an idea, as we will see, that was immensely appealing to Virginians thinking about the end of slavery. A writer calling himself “Rusticus” argued that activists’ efforts would be counterproductive to slavery’s preordained decline in the United States. “Slaves are a contradiction to the laws of a free government,” he explained. As the nation grew and developed, slavery would cease to serve its needs and would be abandoned. Tampering with that Providential plan was to flout nature and flirt with disaster. “Can human law change the system,” Rusticus asked, “or . . . overthrow the fixed order of nature and improve the original?” If that were the case, he snorted, then man would be able to “make out of the sheep-hairy African negroe, a spirited, noble, and generous American Freeman!”, an obvious impossibility. For Rusticus, like Fairfax, racial differences mandated that emancipation be accompanied by the separation of blacks from white society.⁴²

The cosmopolitan sensibility of the Revolutionary moment in the early to mid-1790s allowed for a hardy counter to these ideas. In the face of such racialized conceptions of humanity, black and white antislavery activists alike articulated a conception of a universal mankind, an understanding most often distilled into references to St. Paul’s lesson to the Athenians that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.”⁴³ Normative as it might be in practice, this credo made the model of abolition taking place in a place such as Philadelphia a vision for the future, one in which freed blacks would be incorporated into society. Among the materials circulated between antislavery activists were numerous writings providing evidence of black intellectual and emotional capacities and signs that freed blacks could contribute. African-Americans themselves took part in this effort. A writer calling himself “Africanus” wrote from New York City to contest Rusticus’s ideas as unreasoned, uncharitable, and unchristian.⁴⁴ To honor George Washington on his birthday in 1792, a group of free blacks in Philadelphia composed a poem to the president touting his virtues and hoping they would soon produce abolition elsewhere. The “Free Africans of Philadelphia,” a Philadelphia newspaper editor who printed the verses opined, were a group who had “conducted themselves in a manner that would do honor to the most polished community.”⁴⁵ The funeral of the wife of prominent African-American leader William Gray in

Philadelphia, at which both white and black citizens paid their respects, induced another editor to foretell “the time, fast approaching, when the important declaration of *holy writ* will be fully verified, that ‘God hath made of one blood, all the nations of the Earth.’”⁴⁶

This line of thought was hardly general, even in Philadelphia, but the connection between a Revolution rooted in the ideal of human equality and the inexorable end of slavery had consequences, both real and epistemic. Philadelphia, New York, and some other urban areas in the mid-Atlantic and New England states, became enclaves for African-American organization and activism. Their efforts would be rooted in the same motivations that had prompted slaves and free blacks to act in the 1770s, and, like those efforts, they could be made through an appeal to a Revolution—one that now had produced a new nation—that had made liberty and equality fundamental human rights.⁴⁷ That Revolution, in fact, was universal, its principles transformative across national lines. While it was “American,” it was also potentially global.

White abolitionists saw evidence of this transnational potential when they looked to Europe. Pennsylvania occupied a “more advanced stage” in the “Business” they were all involved in, the Pennsylvania Society president explained to his correspondent in London.⁴⁸ A decree passed by the National Assembly in mid-1790 that expanded civil rights for some people of color in the French West Indies, he noted later, was an “advance” that would “forward the great business of the abolition of slavery, and of a just recognition of the Rights of Man.”⁴⁹ French emancipation was taken by some as notice that France had overtaken the United States in that common struggle. Activist Benjamin Rush described the news as a sign that “the French . . . are more rapid in their motions than we.”⁵⁰ Over this period, American antislavery took on a populist cast, especially among urban radicals, as writers connected the efforts and accomplishments of American activists to a global struggle for liberty and equality. Developing what Seth Cotlar has termed a “cosmopolitan variant of anti-slavery discourse,” emergent democrats embraced a fundamental expansion of both the *demos* and the aegis of the government formed by it. A key text—indeed, a key phrase—that encapsulated this approach was Thomas Paine’s *The Rights of Man*, the first part of which was available in the United States in May 1791. Paine’s writing, which was at heart a retort to Edmund Burke’s critique of French republicanism, became a byword for resistance to any sort of oppression.⁵¹ In adopting this stance, American radicals embraced a Revolution envisioned in universal terms recognizable to men such as Africanus. Slavery, like monarchy, was a vestige of an earlier time; its continuance was a sign that further work was needed. A Fourth of July toast made at one Philadelphia group’s celebration called for “a speedy extinction of that species of slavery which disgraces our country—degrades too many of our fellow citizens—and gives lie to our declaration of Independence.”⁵² A newspaper editor prompted his readers to sneer at the ads for runaway slaves in British Jamaica, sarcastically marking them as “charming proof of civilized society, of that age of reason and philosophy, of humanity, or approaching millenium [*sic*] and of the *rights of man!*”⁵³ By this understanding, antislavery success became a marker of Revolutionary probity—and that Revolution, like the slavery it would dispatch, transcended national borders. The “revolution” at hand, one writer suggested, would “conform the government of the world to the interest and welfare of the human

race.” It would only be complete when “all people [were] restored to the safe and peaceable enjoyments of their natural rights and privileges [and] slavery [was] abolished throughout the world.”⁵⁴

In this discursive environment, the global revolution was envisioned as ongoing and as beset by enemies. The violence and war that erupted in the Caribbean and Europe during the period tested that logic, and ultimately transformed its implications for antislavery activity in the United States, but it also heightened the stakes. In some hands this produced an open embrace of violent efforts against slavery. Abraham Bishop, a Democratic-Republican pamphleteer in Connecticut, penned a reaction to the insurrections in Saint Domingue entitled “RIGHTS OF BLACK MEN” in which he argued that the slaves’ violence was a direct expression of the same struggle begun by the American patriots. Bishop was galled by what he saw as the hypocrisy of American lamentations for the fate of the French planters at the hands of men who were simply fighting for “Freedom,” which was “the natural right of all rational beings.” Americans had shed blood to fight a threat that was far less serious, he noted, coining slogans such as “Liberty or Death” and “all men are equal.” Looking to France, they had “gloried that men, long oppressed, had dared to assert their rights.” “Let us be consistent Americans,” he railed, “if we justify our own conduct in the late glorious Revolution, let us justify those who, in a cause like ours fight with equal bravery.”⁵⁵ The vigor of Bishop’s viewpoint was hardly typical, but his ideas were reprinted in newspapers up and down the coast.⁵⁶ Nor was he alone in voicing the idea that slave violence was part of an ongoing struggle against tyranny and oppression. Both David Rice of Kentucky and Theodore Dwight of Connecticut offered similar, if more mildly stated, versions of the point.⁵⁷ Delaware Quaker Warner Mifflin, who had been spurred by the American Revolution to divest himself of slaves, had a dream after hearing about the slave violence that led him to see both struggles as part of a Providential plan.⁵⁸ His private actions against slavery would be matched with public efforts before Congress and the Delaware state government well into the 1790s.

Such responses to the violence and tenor of the French Revolution in Saint Domingue built on extant ideas about slavery’s dangers, but also expanded them in new ways. The result was an antislavery stance that was American in origin, but whose logic was universal. British and French abolitionists rendered Saint Domingue as simply a dramatic and ongoing example of the risks involved when an unjust system was imposed. British abolitionist Percival Stockdale, in a letter to Granville Sharp published late in 1791 and read by Americans, argued that the slaves’ “ravages” were proof of their humanity. “We are (to speak properly) the savages,” he explained, “the Africans act like *men*; like beings endowed with rational, and immortal minds.”⁵⁹ Writings like those of Bishop, Dwight, and Rice, however, made black violence a valid expression of an ongoing and single revolution for liberty, orchestrated by God, under way at once in America, France, and Saint Domingue. Being on the right side of the issue was more than a question of consistency. Being faithful to the Revolution’s principles was vital to the republic’s success. Americans had sworn oaths in favor of universal liberty, Bishop reminded, and had been rewarded with God’s favor. The “Universal Father” was now freeing blacks in the West Indies, demonstrating that “of one blood, he has created all nations of men that dwell on the face of the earth.”⁶⁰ Beyond being simply interesting, this was a portent for Americans

to ponder. "He is teaching them, as he taught you," Bishop reminded, "that freedom from the tyranny of men is to be had *only* at the price of blood." Failing to follow this lesson would put the United States on the wrong side of history, and would have consequences.⁶¹ Mifflin wondered if his dream constituted a warning to the American South. Three years after his first printed oration, Dwight defended ongoing antislavery efforts in the United States and chastised places like Virginia where the "spirit of republicanism, equality, freedom and enmity to tyranny . . . exist but in sound." "Let them visit New-England," Dwight charged, "and learn the rudiments of freedom."⁶²

Black Americans needed no such lessons. The impact of the disruptions in France and the Caribbean on American ideas about their Revolution and the principles it rested upon was further shaped by the physical emanations of those disruptions. The violence in Saint Domingue, and the shifts in French policy that it produced, was well understood in both free and enslaved black communities in the United States, as it was around the Atlantic more generally.⁶³ Just as the presence of the British armies had provided the means for striking out against slavery during the War, now the conception of "Frenchness" served to order individual and collective acts of resistance. Slaves living in coastal Virginia were reported as plotting rebellion in the spring of 1792, prompting local officials to increase patrols, make arrests, and deport several slaves to Cuba.⁶⁴ Rumors spread of similar activities in North Carolina.⁶⁵ The influx of Saint Dominguan refugees the following June added to this tendency, according to those terrified whites who reported on their activities. A white man in Richmond chased a crowd of black men away from his window one night in June, but then crept back to overhear two that remained talk of a plan "to kill the white people soon in this place" just as "they blacks has killed the whites in the French Island and took it a little while ago."⁶⁶ At nearly the same moment, a plot was discovered at Yorktown when a mislaid letter was found in one of the town's streets. Written by a conspirator in Richmond to another in nearby Norfolk, it referenced "our friend in Charleston" and his six thousand followers in South Carolina. The plan among these "brethren" was to set fires and then to "kill all before us" in a rebellion that was to start simultaneously in numerous towns.⁶⁷ The letter was signed "Secret Keeper," but it was really no secret that enslaved peoples might rise up in rebellion. Governor William Moultrie of South Carolina learned of the plans for fire and butchery from a correspondent, who added that "they say the Negroes of Cape Francois have attained their liberties by this method and they will proceed in the same manner."⁶⁸

Little hard evidence surfaced, but in the aftermath of the "Secret Keeper" discoveries whites across Virginia described slaves as acting in newly assertive and aggressive ways. "Perhaps I am alarmed for trifling reasons," one Virginian wrote to Governor Henry Lee, but there was something "in the conversation of the people of Colour" in his community that he found dangerous. Everyone noticed an increase in slaves' "insolence." More ominously, some told of slaves who were gathering in groups and securing arms.⁶⁹ "Since the melancholy affair at Hispaniola," the militia commander in Warwick county, Virginia, wrote, "the Inhabitants of the lower country . . . have been repeatedly alarmed by some of their Slaves having attempted to raise an Insurrection."⁷⁰ In Charleston, a ship's mate heard a group of slaves confidently tell each other that they "need not be afraid" of the small number of troops in the city.⁷¹

Whites were afraid. The rumors of slave violence were mixed in with a host of domestic disruptions, many of which were seemingly tied to the increasingly violent turn taken by the French Revolution. As Rachel Hope Cleves has argued, the fears produced by these episodes—be it Genet’s activities, the rise of the Democratic Societies, or later the resistance of the Whiskey rebels—were constitutive of American politics by the mid-1790s. Taken together with news from France, they produced a new way to talk about the American Revolution, one in which its legacy was set because its accomplishments were complete. Those who sought further change, by this understanding, were a threat. This provided to be a powerful alternative to the universalism that grounded the cosmopolitan sensibilities of the early ’90s. Conservatives called the actors behind these developments “Jacobins,” and anti-Jacobin discourse developed as a precise critique of ideas denigrated as “French.” Despite that national appellation, the real poison lay in the universalism of Jacobinical ideas. Anti-Jacobinism understood the threat of these radical ideas as real, and held up “natural” ideas of social order, Christianity, and the rule of law as counter-principles to the anarchic leveling that came from the cosmopolitan embrace of the “rights of man.”⁷²

Americans could still oppose slavery in this context, but, for many, the disruptions of the age had disentangled the Revolutionary American polity from the Atlantic currents around it. Pennsylvania Society member John Pemberton learned of the National Convention’s action from a British correspondent, who viewed it positively, “whatever may be the sentiments of men Concerning the Conduct of that Assembly in other respects.”⁷³ For Pemberton and men like him, French emancipation could be separated out from other expressions of Jacobin excess because of its connections to their common past and the ideals that connected them. For others, the context of the radicalized French Revolution spurred different comparisons. British émigré William Cobbett, whose vituperative attacks on the French Revolutionaries, and on those British and Americans whom he saw as their allies, typified (and empowered) the transatlantic anti-Jacobin discourse, placed French emancipation in line with other examples of the “Frenchified system of liberty” and the “*gang of blood-thirsty cannibals*” who presided over it. This led him to tout the abolition plans pursued by some American states which, in contrast to the “mad plan of the National Convention,” derived from a “sincere desire of seeing all mankind free and happy” because they stemmed from a mature consideration of local circumstances, not a reflexive spasm born of general principles applied willy-nilly.⁷⁴

This critique reconceptualized American antislavery by posing it as a moral crusade, tied more closely to the Christian tenet of the golden rule than the egalitarian-tinged notion that mankind was all of “one blood.” The Revolution that generated this impulse, by this understanding, was less an expression of Paine’s rights of man than an emanation of a natural order made possible by the sweeping away of corrupt, ill-gotten, and illicit forms of authority.⁷⁵ Americans’ Revolution had produced liberty; France’s had been twisted into Jacobinical license. In men such as Cobbett’s hands, this notion could facilitate swipes at both American “democrats,” whom he would reveal to actually be demagogues riling up the masses with their promises of equality, and slave owners, who called themselves republicans but were actually tyrants. In a 1795 pamphlet, Cobbett skewered both Mifflin, whom he linked to Brissot, and white Southerners. “After having spent the day in singing hymns to the Goddess

of Liberty, the virtuous Democrat gets him home to his peaceful dwelling,” Cobbett mocked, “and sleeps with his *property* secure beneath his roof, yea, sometimes in his very *arms*.”⁷⁶ The one was a fool, the others hypocrites; none were safe for the American polity.

Those who continued to embrace an antislavery connected to transnational Revolutionary currents tended to focus more on the opponents of both—Caribbean planters and enemies of the French Revolution more generally—than the specifics behind slavery’s immorality. In the face of mounting anti-Jacobin discourse, Democratic-Republican political operatives deployed slavery as part of their attacks on those they deemed to be closeted supporters of Britain and opponents of the American Revolution’s ‘true’ egalitarian precepts. Equality and emancipation were legitimate emanations of that Revolution, though the crux of the point was usually to highlight the perfidy of those who resisted the changes at hand more generally. The violence that led to emancipation in Saint Domingue, Philadelphia *National Gazette* editor Phillip Freneau proclaimed, was regrettable, but necessary to the cause of freedom. Placing it in line with other episodes when counter-revolutionaries met their just deserts, he asked “Can the annihilation of a cruel, vicious, aristocratic people, enemies to the French Republic, be a crime?” he asked, placing the episode in line with other moments when counter-revolutionaries met their just deserts. “No! No!” These were “blood-suckers of the people” who “pollute the land of liberty,” a space that might well be France, the United States, or the French Caribbean.⁷⁷ Likeminded writers seconded these sentiments by pairing anti-British and antislavery ideas. A report of slave unrest in Guadeloupe in the Philadelphia *Federal Gazette* was interspersed with sarcastic comments, such as “[O *horrid!* what, shall *Negroes be free!*—those black devils whom we have bought with our *cash*, and who are as much our slaves as the *Hessians* and *Hanoverians are slaves to Britons*—shall these be *free!!! O bella, horrida bella!*].”⁷⁸ French emancipation, marked by all as a game-changer in the war in the West Indies, was taken by these writers as a reasonable and reliable path to accomplish Revolutionary goals. The “revolution” taking place, one composition read, would “conform the government of the world to the interest and welfare of the human race,” and would only be complete when “domestic and national slavery, may be abolished throughout the world.”⁷⁹

In placing emancipation at the center of the framework by which the global revolution was defined, Democratic-Republican writers gave antislavery expressions a utilitarian function. The counter-revolution, waged by “aristocrats,” “monocrats,” and “royalists” in the name of “tyranny,” was to be identified by an acceptance of slavery. “Liberty” and “freedom” were to be defined by its absence. “What opinion must we then form of those men, however they may talk of patriotism, of liberty, equality, &c. &c. who keep their fellow creatures, in a state of wretched servitude,” one writer naming himself “A Democrat” wondered, “Can they feel, can they know the value of liberty?”⁸⁰ Men who failed to find slavery repugnant, he asserted, were not only obviously ignorant of the meaning of liberty and therefore untrustworthy as citizens, they were dangerous to the republic itself. In defining their beliefs by locating their enemies, however, these operatives shifted the emphasis away from the principle of universal egalitarianism and towards the politics of unity, defined by actions and affinities, rather than by absolute truths. Despite having written sympathetically about the rebels of Saint Domingue, even Abraham Bishop, a besieged

Republican in Federalist Connecticut, ultimately abandoned racially inclusive ideas of egalitarianism, instead evolving towards espousing white equality in the face of the power of elites such as Dwight.⁸¹

As momentous as French emancipation was as a domestic political marker, it was sapped of direct meaning in the United States. That observers seized upon it as a site to judge French radicalism is significant in that it demonstrates the continuing traction opposition to slavery could have in American politics, but few, if any, white commentators went further than seeing French liberty as a beneficent grant made by France. This emancipation was French; its connections to other places was left unstated. Despite Citizen Genet's hopes to the contrary, even the most ardent American Francophiles refused to directly connect the American and French Revolutions along this particular path. The global revolution that fueled the Girondin vision might function in Paris, and even in the Caribbean. In those places, war empowered a zero-sum approach to both the Revolution and slavery. In the United States, however, the diversity of American relationships to slavery ensured that this conception would take only among slaves and people of color. Localism, not cosmopolitanism, would drive the white Democratic-Republican response to the issue.

Such localism could accommodate an opposition to American slavery, but it did so in ways that proceeded from the fact of the nation's independence—its Revolutionary settlement—rather than debates over its unfolding character. This static sense imposed an order on the Revolution's legacy, writing out black participation and claims for inclusion. Instead, free or freed blacks were conceived of as alien to the polity, and even as hostile to its formation. Unsurprisingly, given the wartime experience there, this conceptualization originated in the Chesapeake region. By the mid-1790s, the burst of manumissions and antislavery activity that had followed the War dwindled in the face of the vision of slave violence in the French Caribbean and its prospect at home. The tenor of Thomas Jefferson's trajectory was typical. Jefferson's acceptance of Revolutionary violence in France lasted longer than many of his peers.⁸² Though he never openly accepted the legitimacy of slave insurrection, or connected it to the French Revolution, the ongoing tumult in Saint Domingue did lead him to think about slavery's future in the United States. News from the French colony convinced him that slavery would produce "bloody scenes which our children certainly, and possibly ourselves (South of Patowmac) [will] have to wade through," he wrote to James Monroe. Ending slavery was important in avoiding that fate, but, for Jefferson, emancipation in Saint Domingue pointed towards a world segregated by race. "I become daily more and more convinced that all the West India islands will remain in the hands of the people of color," he explained to Monroe, "and a total expulsion of the whites sooner or later [would] take place."⁸³ In relating the same ideas to his daughter, Jefferson added the sense that this result was a natural development. "St. Domingo has expelled all it's [sic] whites, has given freedom to all it's [sic] blacks, has established a regular government of the blacks and coloured people, and seems now to have taken it's [sic] ultimate form," he told her, a fate to which "all of the West India islands must come" as well.⁸⁴

Other Virginians gave flesh to the idea. Like Fernando Fairfax (and Rusticus) before him, St. George Tucker published a plan for ending slavery in Virginia in 1796 that took the American Revolution as a spur, but which paired emancipation

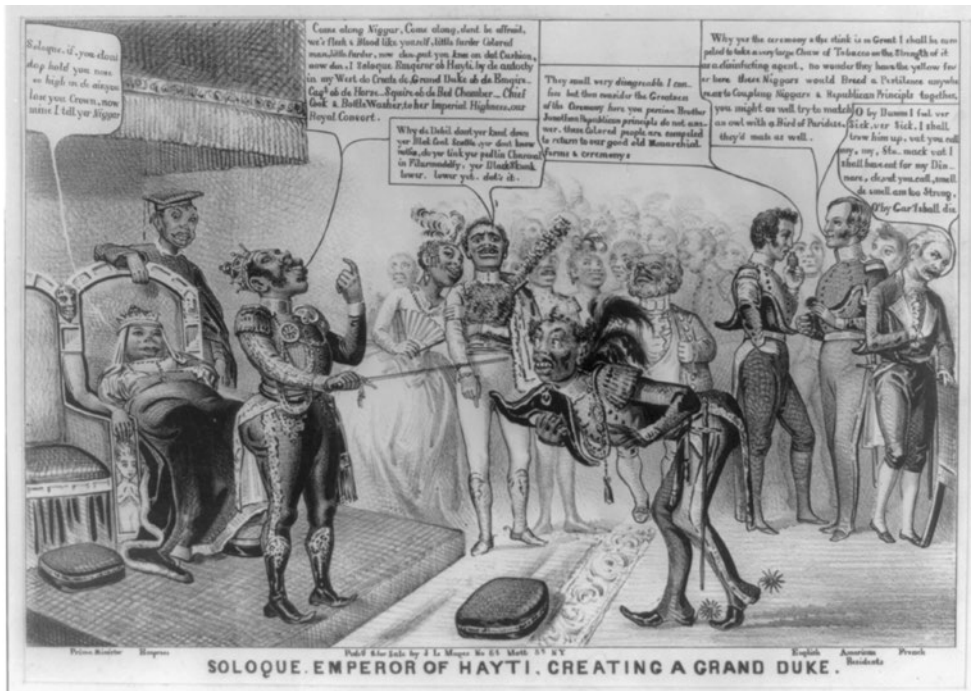


Figure 10.1 This print from the first half of the nineteenth century conveys the racist disgust directed at the Republic of Haiti. While white diplomats look askance off to the right, the print makes people of color appear ridiculous. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-29990.

with black removal. Dwelling on the irony that Americans, who “whilst offering up vows at the shrine of Liberty . . . were imposing on our fellow men, who differ in complexion from us, a *slavery*, ten thousand times more cruel,” Tucker proposed a mechanism for emancipation that was so gradual it would transpire over the entire century. To induce the ex-slaves to leave, he suggested granting them so few liberties and rights that they would emigrate voluntarily. His plan, however, was necessary not only to cleanse the American experiment of inconsistency, but also for the well-being of whites, for whom “history evinces” the dangers of holding slaves. “At this moment we have the most awful demonstrations” of these dangers, Tucker exclaimed, pointing to Saint Domingue.⁸⁵ Jefferson wrote to Tucker approving of the plan, wondering if “the first chapter of this history” had been written in “St. Domingo,” a lesson that would “prepare our minds for a peaceable accommodation between justice, policy and necessity,” for “if something is not done, and soon done, we shall be the murderers of our own children.”⁸⁶ Four years later, Tucker’s cousin, George Tucker, authored a similar plan.⁸⁷

This approach to the problem of slavery emphasized the discrete nature of the American polity, preserving a connection to the Revolutionary ideals that militated against the institution, but rendering them as safe, as long as they were administered by the proper hands. Over the second half of the decade, slavery continued to surface

in American politics. In the heat of the partisan divisions that emerged around the Adams administration's domestic policies and the Quasi-War with France, both Federalists and their opponents agreed that dangerous external forces were at work that were seeking to divide and subvert the republic. In this political environment, antislavery efforts were easily construed as threats, "entering wedges," in a common construction, by which fanatical "advocates of emancipation" attempted to force their "false philosophy and misplaced philanthropy" where it would only produce harm.⁸⁸ Various measures introduced by representatives from New England and mid-Atlantic states proposing to curtail slavery's spread or protect free black rights sparked immediate and vitriolic attacks from slaveholding interests. Those from the lower South, as they had since abolitionists first approached Congress, offered the most florid language. When George Thatcher of Massachusetts (Maine) rose to amend the bill establishing the government of the Mississippi territory so as to forbid slavery there, a measure "touching the rights of man," the Southern response equated those rights with setting "blacks at liberty to cut your throats."⁸⁹ In a petition by free black leaders in Philadelphia for a national program of gradual emancipation, John Rutledge of South Carolina saw more of the "new-fangled French philosophy of liberty and equality," too much of which had "found its way" into the chambers. Pressed, he launched into a history of the French Revolution, telling how a slight expansion of rights for people of color, entertained by Thatcher's "brother philosopher, Brissot," had produced catastrophe in its slaveholding colonies.⁹⁰

Though some Legislators might resist the fact, the gambit to make emancipation "French," and all things French toxic was effective. While he was "no friend to some of the doctrines of the French," Thatcher explained, "there were others he much admired." Emancipation was one such doctrine: "If slavery was an evil"—and for Thatcher it certainly was—"the French have wiped away this evil." Tucker's model for the United States, however, was St. George Tucker's plan.⁹¹ Other Congressmen shared the sense that the institution was wrong, but, instead of talking about rights and equality, spoke of the need to ameliorate slaves' conditions or attenuate slavery's impact by spreading it across new areas.⁹² With radical interventions against slavery made out of bounds, a basic agreement emerged that slavery was bad because it was dangerous, but that it was dangerous because it was a source of disorder in society, not a crime against humanity. Northern conservatives could join in this understanding, pairing their disdain for "Jacobin" ideas of equality with fears of social disorder. Samuel W. Dana, Federalist from Connecticut, equated "the dreadful scenes of St. Domingo" with the effects of the "farrago of French metaphysics" and "religious fanaticism" during the debate over the 1800 petition.⁹³ This same approach led the Federalist Adams administration to enter into agreements with Toussaint Louverture, who had become the leader of the Afro-Caribbean forces in Saint Domingue by the late 1790s, in which the United States pledged to offer him material and naval support in order to bolster his increasingly open hostility to metropolitan France.⁹⁴ Democratic-Republicans assailed this policy as proof that the Federalists were British lapdogs, but none suggested that black liberty was an end in itself. Even those politicians who continued to push for vigorous action against slavery conceded the basic point that freed blacks were an alien presence. George Thatcher described American slaves as "700,000 enemies, in the very body of the United States" a "cancer of immense magnitude, that would some time destroy the body

politic.”⁹⁵ Thatcher’s remedy was to cut out the cancer and to remove its symptoms, removing the “enemies” that slavery had created from the nation altogether.

African-Americans contested this conception in word and deed. African-American leader James Forten thanked Thatcher for his efforts, but echoed the Congressman’s expressions with a different emphasis. “Though our faces are black, yet we are men,” he insisted; slavery was the violent force, not those it enslaved. The “seven hundred thousand” that Forten referred to were “of the human race” and he continued to hope that blacks, slave and free, would leave the institution behind, thereby conforming the nation’s practices to its principles.⁹⁶ Several months later, outside of Richmond, Gabriel, the slave of Thomas Prosser, plotted a rebellion against local white power that was rooted in some of the same impulses. When the plot was disrupted and the plans leaked, a picture formed of a rebellion informed by local politics (and potentially involving shadowy French actors) but which was designed to recast local society according to egalitarian principles. As Douglas Egerton has shown, the battles between Virginian Federalists and Republicans had led Gabriel to believe that Richmond’s freedom-loving artisans would support an effort to oust the conservative merchant faction that had constrained American liberty. One of the insurgents equated the effort to that of white Americans during the American Revolution. “I have nothing more to offer than what General Washington would have had to offer, had he been taken by the British and put to trial,” he reputedly told the magistrates, “I have adventured my life in endeavouring to obtain the liberty of my countrymen, and am a willing sacrifice in their cause.”⁹⁷

Taken together, these efforts were serious, if divergent, bids to advance a common cause. As disruptions, however, they only served to reinforce the trajectory of white Revolutionary antislavery attitudes. Virginia Governor James Monroe was aware of the dangers the plot posed, but he was equally concerned with controlling its use by the Federalists who were opposing the campaign of Thomas Jefferson for the presidency. He quickly buried all proof of “French” involvement. Federalist politicians would not be put off that easily, however, and immediately sought to make hay from intimations that the Republicans’ Francophilia was a source of danger to the slaveholding South. The “Jacobins,” *Gazette of the United States* editor John Fenno, Jr. explained, hoping to seduce white voters, had spewed their “common cant of *Liberty and Equality*” in the attempt to split the “Eastern” and “Southern” states, overthrow Adams, and replace him with Jefferson. These “French principles,” however, had backfired by prompting slaves to plan fire, rape, and bloodshed.⁹⁸ Jefferson’s supporters had nearly produced “the horrors of St. Domingo” at home.⁹⁹ “Mourn hapless State, thy follies mourn!” a poem to Virginia called, “By ruthless Blacks and Demo’s [sic] torn.”¹⁰⁰ This tack partnered well with an ongoing effort to tar Jefferson among Southerners by suggesting that his ideas were threatening to slaveholders. The attack focused on *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson’s 1781–1782 treatise in which he voiced doubts both about slavery’s justice and about black capacities. Federalist writers jumped at the chance to expose his specious and inconsistent reasoning and to link his ideas to the fatal French “philanthropy” they saw as plaguing the world.¹⁰¹ Doing so, however, also asserted a natural alliance between “Jacobins” at home and abroad and the black population. With emancipation linked to the “philanthropy” of social leveling and violence, Federalist political discourse left little room for positions such as Thatcher’s on emancipation. It did, however, accommodate his understanding of domestic “enemies.”

Victorious in 1801, Jefferson emerged at the head of a trans-sectional Republican party, one that had successfully identified the interests of a coalition of Southern slaveholders, urban democrats, and yeoman farmers. To forge this coalition, Republican politicians had shunted aside the issue of the Revolution's legacy for slavery, allowing multiple interpretations to coexist and, ultimately, to make what had been a practical reality into a principle: the American union created by this "second American Revolution" would embrace a variety of responses to the problem of slavery. Its embodiment of liberty and equality would not necessarily imply emancipation, let alone black incorporation. The emancipation accomplished in some of the states was a badge of honor, not a reminder of what was yet to be accomplished.¹⁰² "No man . . . wishes more than I do to see an abolition of slavery," Pennsylvanian Republican Albert Gallatin averred, "when it can be properly effected."¹⁰³ When pressed, Gallatin and others turned to the dangers black freedom efforts created, a point given grist by Gabriel and the ongoing violence in the French Caribbean.¹⁰⁴ Freedom, applied incorrectly, was destructive; there would be some parts of the United States where slavery's end would be imperceptible, or maybe even impossible. The independence created by the Revolution would not produce a universal solution to the problem of slavery; the freedom it embodied would be for whites alone.

The end of a particular stage of French-related disruptions conditioned the major episodes in which this brand of American antislavery evolved in the early years of the nineteenth century. Early in Jefferson's first term, the Peace of Amiens concluded the war between France and Britain, freeing France's still relatively new leader, Napoleon Bonaparte, to focus anew on the empire's Caribbean colonies. Acceding to a growing trend in Paris against a universal approach to citizenship and rights across the empire, Bonaparte reacted strongly to Toussaint Louverture's increasingly autonomous rule of Saint Domingue—to include, before the Quasi-War had diminished, Louverture's separate negotiations with the United States. Early in 1802, the First Consul sent a massive force to reimpose control over Saint Domingue and Guadeloupe, the two colonies in which people of color had moved to positions of authority. The commanders were given secret instructions to remove black leaders and to prepare to reimpose slavery. Louverture would not survive the invasion, but neither would the French colony of Saint Domingue. On January 1, 1804, the nation of Haiti would declare itself independent from France, a polity whose central pillar was a commitment to the absence of slavery and whose citizens were, by definition, identified as "black."¹⁰⁵

This identity jibed with Jefferson's understanding. "The course of things in the neighboring islands of the West Indies appears to have given a considerable impulse to the minds of the slaves," he noted, thinking of Gabriel's plot and successive unrest.¹⁰⁶ The blacks of Saint Domingue, he explained shortly after it had been averted, "are established into a sovereignty *de facto*, and have organized themselves under regular laws and government."¹⁰⁷ In terms of politics, American neutrality was the best way to navigate this situation. When Bonaparte's emissaries sought support for the invasion, the Jefferson administration was coy, and ultimately refused to give France special treatment, conduct that contributed to the French army's ultimate failure.¹⁰⁸ With regard to political ideology, this squared with Jefferson's ideas of "nations." Saint Domingue was not to be a political entity or a recognized state, but it was to be understood as occupying a distinct—and separate—place in the region.¹⁰⁹ Such

a place was a source of danger—here Jefferson's approach did not differ much from his predecessor—but the threat came from its "black," rather than its "French," character. That character, however, served as a mirror by which Jeffersonians could envision the United States. As a "black" nation, Saint Domingue/Haiti was a distinct and mutually exclusive place from that of the (white) United States. In the aftermath of Gabriel's plot, Jefferson proposed that the jailed rebels might be deported there, since "their present ruler [Louverture] might be willing . . . to recieve [sic] [those slaves] which would be exiled for acts deemed criminal by us, but meritorious perhaps, by him."¹¹⁰ Acts that were deviant in white society were righteous in one peopled by blacks.

The abolition of the slave trade, which percolated through Congress between 1802 and 1808, followed this logic. Legislators fell over themselves proclaiming the inhumanity of the trade. "Gentleman seemed all to unite in their abhorrence," William Findley of Pennsylvania explained, "they differed only about the means of preventing it."¹¹¹ This unanimity was especially marked around the desire to "avert the evil apprehended from the introduction of brigands from the West India Islands," as a Congressional record keeper summarized on another occasion.¹¹² As the various measures to put the ban into effect were debated, representatives from across the sections and in both parties joined in a conception of slavery's immorality that was rooted in the danger it provided to whites, and which only allowed for remedies that combined ameliorating slave conditions and strengthening local white control. The chief end of the effort, it was clear, was the cleansing of the polity of a dangerous black stain. This goal was not simply the result of a desire to end American "participation in those violations of human rights which have been so long continued on the unoffending inhabitants of Africa," as Jefferson put it in his annual message in 1806, but also a product of the consensus that blacks were separate from the polity.¹¹³ New slaves should be barred; freed slaves (to include any captured when the ban was violated in some way) should be removed. Echoing George Thatcher, Northerners and Southerners, Republicans and Federalists alike agreed that imported slaves were "enemies," a quality that many turned to "St. Domingo" to prove.¹¹⁴

When, in February 1807, the trade was abolished, white Americans could congratulate themselves for their humanity, but they had also tacitly agreed upon a particular approach to slavery as part of the now adolescent republic. Empowered by the federal structure, politicians from the lower South had achieved their long-term goal of preventing national actions towards the institution. Joined by those from the Chesapeake, they effectively prevented much further debate at the national level between 1808 and 1819. Chesapeake slaveholders had good reason to be supportive. Jefferson's purchase of the Louisiana territory in 1803 was made possible by the destruction of the French armies in Saint Domingue, an event that led Bonaparte to abandon his plan to use the area as a North American foodmart for the rejuvenated French Caribbean colonies.¹¹⁵ As a result, planters in Virginia could move or sell their slave property into the rich lands between Georgia and the Mississippi River, taking advantage of the burgeoning cotton economy there. After January 1, 1808, they could be assured of the high prices produced by a closed market for their slave property.¹¹⁶

As James Sidbury argues, this chain of events constituted an "unmitigated disaster" for Chesapeake slaves, as sale, dislocation, and a new labor regime

fundamentally compromised their lives, families, and communities.¹¹⁷ This same disruption operated more generally on African-Americans writ large in the United States, blunting the effects, if not the terms, of their call for a Revolutionary American polity, in which racial difference did not stand in the way of inclusion and participation. Legacy, after all, is a form of historicization, and history—and perhaps especially national histories—reflect the agendas of those with power in society.¹¹⁸ Whereas different American Revolutions were available to the various Americans who confronted slavery as a problem in the late 1780s and early 1790s, a durable consensus had been forged by 1808. Instead of a Revolution partnered with other like movements around the globe, white Americans agreed upon one that was discrete; instead of representative, it was exceptional. Above all, instead of a Revolution that was ongoing, it was complete. According to this perspective, at least, the legacy of the American Revolution for slavery was a nation in which democracy had been tamed and liberty included the freedom to hold slaves.

NOTES

- 1 Philip D. Morgan and Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, “Arming Slaves in the American Revolution,” in Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age* (New Haven, 2006): 180–208; Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and Their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston, 2006) 21–72; Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, 1991) 45–142.
- 2 Trevor Burnard, “Freedom, Migration, and the American Revolution,” in Eliga H. Gould and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *The American Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Baltimore, 2005) 295–314.
- 3 Barbara Fields, “Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America,” *New Left Review* 181 (1990): 95–118.
- 4 Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492–1800* (London, 1997).
- 5 Gary B. Nash, *Race and Revolution* (Madison, 1991) 3–23; Nash, “Sparks from the Altar of 76: International Repercussions and Reconsiderations of the American Revolution,” in David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840* (New York, 2010): 1–19.
- 6 David Waldstreicher, *Slavery’s Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification* (New York, 2009) 39–43.
- 7 Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, 2006) 105–258.
- 8 David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, 1975); Gary B. Nash, *The Forgotten Fifth: African Americans in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, 2006). See also Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill, 2006), especially 1–41; and George William Van Cleve, “Founding a Slaveholders’ Union, 1770–1797,” in John Craig Hammond and Matthew Mason, eds., *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville, 2011) 117–137. For a different interpretation, see Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1991).
- 9 Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, History, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh, 2009) 25, note 40. Buck-Morss was following on points originally made by David Brion Davis.

- 10 Douglas R. Egerton, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America* (New York, 2009), Nash, *Forgotten Fifth*, Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*.
- 11 Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, 1982); Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Low Country* (Chapel Hill, 1998).
- 12 See, for example, "Petition for freedom to Massachusetts Governor Thomas Gage, His Majesty's Council, and the House of Representatives, 25 May 1774," Jeremy Belknap papers, Massachusetts Historical Society Online Collections, www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?old=1&item_id=589.
- 13 Abigail Adams to John Adams, Sept. 22, 1774 [electronic edition], Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive, Massachusetts Historical Society Online Collections, www.masshist.org/digitaladams.
- 14 Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York, 1976).
- 15 Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York, 1997); David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: a Global History* (Cambridge, 2007).
- 16 Philipp Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots: Americans in Paris in the Age of Revolution* (Charlottesville, 2010).
- 17 Robert G. Parkinson, "'Manifest Signs of Passion': The First Federal Congress, Antislavery, and Legacies of the Revolutionary War," in Hammond and Mason, eds., *Contesting Slavery*, 55–56.
- 18 Lafayette to Washington, Mar. 17, 1790, *George Washington Papers* (GWP) 5:242. Thomas Paine to Washington, May 1, 1790, GWP 5:369. See also (Philadelphia) *Gazette of the United States* Aug. 11, 1790 ("Last week the key to the Bastille . . .").
- 19 Simon P. Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early Republic* (Philadelphia, 1997) 120–151. Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots*.
- 20 John Coatsworth, "American Trade with European Colonies in the Caribbean and South America, 1790–1812," *William and Mary Quarterly* 24 (1967): 243–266. For the relationship between information, commerce, and knowledge, see Alan R. Pred, *Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information: The United States System of Cities, 1790–1840* (Cambridge, 1973), and Will Slauter, "Forward-Looking Statements: News and Speculation in the Age of the American Revolution," *The Journal of Modern History* 81 (Dec. 2009): 759–792.
- 21 Sean X. Goudie, *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic* (Philadelphia, 2006).
- 22 The image was common in reference to slavery, and particularly that in the Caribbean by Americans. Philadelphia *National Gazette* December 5, 1791 ("Extract from MARITIME OBSERVATIONS, Written in 1785 by Dr. Franklin").
- 23 Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: the story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, 2004).
- 24 Jeremy D. Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (Cambridge, 2010).
- 25 Suzanne Desan, "Foreigners, Cosmopolitanism, and French Revolutionary Universalism," in Desan, Lynn Hunt, and William Max Nelson, eds., *The French Revolution in Global Perspective* (Ithaca, 2013) 86–100; Patrice Higonnet, *Sister Republics: The Origins of French and American Republicanism* (Cambridge, 1988) 238–240.
- 26 Matthew Rainbow Hale, "On Their Tiptoes: Political Time and Newspapers During the Advent of the Radicalized French Revolution, Circa 1792–1793," *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, no. 2 (2009): 191–218.
- 27 Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (New York, 2009) 61–73. See also David Brion Davis,

- Revolutions: Reflections on American Equality and Foreign Liberations* (Cambridge, 1990) 28–42.
- 28 Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore, 2010) chapter two.
- 29 Harry Ammon, *The Genet Mission* (New York, 1973); Robert J. Alderson, *This Bright Era of Happy Revolutions: French Consul Michel-Ange-Bernard Mangourit and International Republicanism in Charleston, 1792–1794* (Columbia, 2008).
- 30 Jefferson to James Monroe, May 5, 1793, *Thomas Jefferson Papers* (TJP) 25:660.
- 31 Gary B. Nash and Jeanne R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath* (New York, 1992) 99–113; Egerton, *Death or Liberty*, 93–121; Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca, 1998) 50–118.
- 32 General Meeting Minutebook (GMM) 1:39 (Jul. 7, 1788), Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers (PASP), Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA (HSP).
- 33 J.P. Brissot de Warville (Durand Echeverria, ed.), *New Travels in the United States of America, 1788*, translated by Mara Soceanu Vamos and Durand Echeverria (Cambridge, 1964) 229, 224, 225. For Brissot’s visit to the Pennsylvania Society, see GMM 1:44 (Sept. 3, 1788), PASP. For the limits of gradual emancipation, see Richard S. Newman *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill, 2002) *passim*; Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago, 1967) 124–37; Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers & Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton, 1985); and Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, “Philanthropy at Bargain Prices: Notes on the Economics of Gradual Emancipation,” *Journal of Legal Studies* 3 (1974): 377–401.
- 34 James Pemberton to *Amis des Noirs*, Aug. 30, 1790, Committee of Correspondence Letterbook (CCL) 1:37, PASP. See also PAS to Elhanan Winchester, Mar. 16, 1789, CCL 1:5, PASP. For a more detailed treatment of this meaning of the correspondence among Pennsylvania activists, see James Alexander Dun, “Philadelphia Not Philanthropolis: the limits of Pennsylvanian Antislavery in the Era of the Haitian Revolution,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 135, no. 1 (January, 2011): 73–102.
- 35 See, for example, (Philadelphia) *Federal Gazette* Dec. 24, 1789 (“CONSTITUTION of the MARYLAND SOCIETY, for promoting the ABOLITION OF SLAVERY, and the RELIEF OF FREE NEGROES, and OTHERS, unlawfully held in BONDAGE”). A report of the Maryland Society’s meeting in 1792 occupied more than half of an issue of the (Philadelphia) *General Advertiser* (Feb. 28, 1792). See also “Constitution of the Chester-Town society, for promoting the abolition of slavery and the relief of free negroes, and others, unlawfully held in bondage,” *American Museum*, vol. 11, no. 6, (Appendix II—1792) *90. For a statement of optimism regarding sentiment in the South, see James Pemberton to London Society?, Mar. 1791?, CCL 1:59, PASP.
- 36 James Pemberton to Committee Of The London Society for promoting the abolition of the slave trade, May 21, 1793, CCL 1:108, PASP.
- 37 For “AMERICAN” see (New York) *Gazette of the United States* Aug. 29, 1789. Among the numerous public notices of this plan and its implementation, see (Philadelphia) *Federal Gazette* Aug. 31, 1790 (“Thoughts on the importance of the MAPLE SUGAR TREE, to the UNITED STATES.”).
- 38 (Philadelphia) *General Advertiser* Oct. 16, 1790 (Baltimore, Oct. 13).
- 39 “Plan for liberating the negroes within the united states,” *American Museum*, vol. 8, no. 6 (December 1790) 285.
- 40 (Philadelphia) *Federal Gazette* Dec. 24, 1789 (“CONSTITUTION of the MARYLAND SOCIETY, for promoting the ABOLITION OF SLAVERY, and the RELIEF OF FREE

- NEGROES, and OTHERS, *unlawfully held in BONDAGE*"). See also "Mr. Pinckney's speech on the manumission of slaves" *American Museum*, vol. 6 (July 1789) no. 3, pg. 74–77.
- 41 Parkinson, "Manifest Signs of Passion," Edward B. Rugemer, "Caribbean Slave Revolts and the Origins of the Gag Rule: A Contest between Abolitionism and Democracy, 1797–1835," in Hammond and Mason, eds., *Contesting Slavery*, 94–113.
 - 42 (New York) *Gazette of the United States* Feb. 27, 1790 ("LETTER.—No. III"). *Gazette of the United States* Mar. 5, 1790 ("FOR THE GAZETTE OF THE UNITED STATES, LETTER.—No. IV").
 - 43 This formulation cropped up repeatedly in printed materials in the period, most often but not always in service of antislavery arguments. See, for example (Philadelphia) *National Gazette* Jun. 28, 1792 (Philadelphia) for speculation concerning life on the moon. More generally, see Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley, 1998) 6–10.
 - 44 For Africanus, see (New York) *Gazette of the United States* Mar. 5 and 6, 1790 ("FOR THE GAZETTE OF THE UNITED STATES").
 - 45 (Philadelphia) *Federal Gazette* Feb. 22, 1792 (Philadelphia).
 - 46 (Philadelphia) *Federal Gazette* Jun. 17, 1792 (Philadelphia). Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (Cambridge, 1988) 172.
 - 47 See Davis, *Revolutions*, *passim*. Compare this to the "freedom principle" developed in 18th century France or the sense that British soil was a "unique asylum for liberty," as established by the Somerset decision. See Sue Peabody, *There Are No Slaves in France: The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (New York, 1996); and Brown, *Moral Capital*, 101, and *passim*.
 - 48 James Pemberton to Committee of the Society Instituted at London . . . , Jun. 24, 1789, CCL 1:18, PPAS. See "Letter on slavery—by a negro," *American Museum*, vol. 6, no. 3 (July 1789) 77–80. For tacit notice of the idea that American-style abolition would be the result of the abolition of the slave trade during British abolition debates, see Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 407–11.
 - 49 James Pemberton to President of the Friends of the Blacks, Aug. 29, 1791, CCL 1:68, PASP.
 - 50 Anonymous to Benjamin Rush, Mar. 3, 1794, Benjamin Rush Mss Correspondence, Library Company of Philadelphia, housed in HSP.
 - 51 Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville, 2011) 55–67 (quotation at 61).
 - 52 (Philadelphia) *General Advertiser* Jul. 8, 1794 (Philadelphia). Readers of the same issue would note that New York merchants at the Tontine Coffee House articulated a similar sentiment in their hope that "the soil of America be consecrated by the genius of universal emancipation."
 - 53 (Philadelphia) *General Advertiser* Aug. 5, 1794 (New York).
 - 54 (Philadelphia) *General Advertiser* Aug. 5, 1794 ("An Extract").
 - 55 The essay was originally printed in the (Boston) *Argus* Nov. 22, Nov. 25, and Dec. 6, 1791, under the pseudonym "J. P. Martin." Bishop's authorship is established in Franklin B. Dexter, "Abraham Bishop, of Connecticut, and His Writings," *Massachusetts Historical Society, Proceedings* XIX, no. 2nd ser. (1905): 190–199. See also Tim Matthewson, "Abraham Bishop, 'the Rights of Black Men,' and the American Reaction to the Haitian Revolution," *Journal of Negro History* 67 (1982): 148–154. For treatments of Bishop's writings on slavery, including this one, see David Waldstreicher and Stephen R. Grossbart, "Abraham Bishop's Vocation; or, the Mediation of Jeffersonian Politics," *Journal Of the Early Republic* 18, no. 4 (1998): 617–657, especially 50; and Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 58–59.

- 56 See (Portland) *Cumberland Gazette* Dec. 5, Dec. 12, 1791 and (Philadelphia) *Federal Gazette* Dec. 3, Dec. 7, Dec. 17, 1791.
- 57 Theodore Dwight, *An Oration Spoken before the Society of the Cincinnati, of the State of Connecticut, Met in Hartford, on the 4th of July* (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1792). Unlike Bishop, who judged the efforts of American abolition societies to be too slow, too partial, and too conciliatory, Dwight saw American abolitionism as the fruit of the American Revolution, and placed it in line with the insurrections. David Rice, *Slavery Inconsistent with Justice and Good Policy; Proved by a Speech Delivered in the Convention, Held at Danville, Kentucky. By Philanthropos* (Lexington: J. Bradford; Philadelphia: Parry Hall, 1792). On Rice and the evangelical call to the republic, see James D. Essig, *The Bonds of Wickedness: American Evangelicals against Slavery, 1770–1808* (Philadelphia, 1982) chapter four, especially 87.
- 58 Warner Mifflin to John Parrish, Oct. 10, 1791, Cox–Parrish–Wharton Collection, box 1 (“John Parrish Correspondence, 1794–1799”) folder “Parish, John 1791, 1792,” HSP. See also Warner Mifflin, *The Defense of Warner Mifflin against Aspersions Cast on Him on Account of His Endeavours to Promote Righteousness, Mercy and Peace, among Mankind* (Philadelphia: Printed by Samuel Samson, 1796).
- 59 Percival Stockdale, *A Letter from Percival Stockdale to Granville Sharp, Esq. Suggested to the Author, by the Present Insurrection of the Negroes in the Island of St. Domingo* (Durham: L. Pennington, 1791) 17, 20. See also [William Roscoe], *An Inquiry into the Causes of the Insurrection of the Negroes in the Island of St. Domingo. To Which Are Added, Observations of M. Garrañ-Coulon on the Same Subject, Read in His Absence by M. Gaudet, before the National Assembly, 29th Feb. 1792* (Philadelphia: Joseph Cruikshank, 1792) 3, 18. Roscoe’s writing was serialized in (Philadelphia) *Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser* on Jul. 6, Jul. 7, Jul. 9, Jul. 10, Jul. 19, Jul. 20, Jul. 21, and Jul. 23, 1792.
- 60 (Philadelphia) *Federal Gazette* Dec. 3, 1791 (“following remarks”).
- 61 (Philadelphia) *Federal Gazette* Dec. 7, 1791 (“RIGHT”).
- 62 Theodore Dwight, *An Oration, Spoken before “the Connecticut Society, for the Promotion of Freedom and the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Holden in Bondage.” Convened in Hartford, on the 8th Day of May, A.D. 1794* (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1794).
- 63 Julius S. Scott III, “The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution,” PhD dissertation, Duke University, 1986, David Patrick Geggus, “Slavery, War, and Revolution in the Greater Caribbean, 1789–1815,” in David Barry Gaspar and David Patrick Geggus, eds., *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution in the Greater Caribbean* (Bloomington, 1997): 1–50.
- 64 (Philadelphia) *National Gazette* May 28, 1792 (Philadelphia). See also *New-York Daily Gazette* May 28, 1792 (Petersburg, May 17). This news spread far afield. For notice in London, see (Philadelphia) *Federal Gazette* Sept. 24, 1792 (“ABRIDGEMENT of the STATE of POLITICS. FOR THIS WEEK (July 7.)”). For reaction among Virginians, see Smith Snead, County Lieutenant, to the Governor, May 5, 1792 and W. Wilson to the Governor, May 10, 1792, *Virginia Calendar* (VC), 5:534–535, 542. Also Litt. Savage to the Governor, May 17, 1792, VC, 5:546–547. Also Miles King to Robert Goode, May 17, 1792 in *ibid*, 5:547. Egerton, *Death or Liberty*, 260–261.
- 65 For notice in Philadelphia, see *General Advertiser* Aug. 13, 1792 (Philadelphia, “Extract from Newbern, N.C., Jul. 26”), reprinted *Pennsylvania Gazette* Aug. 15, 1792.
- 66 “John Randolph’s Deposition,” Jul. 21, 1793, VC 6:452–453.
- 67 Secret Keeper, Richmond to Secret Keeper Norfolk (copy), undated, enclosed in William Nelson, Jr. to Thomas Newton, Aug. 8, 1793, Henry Lee Executive Papers, box 4, folder 13, Executive Papers, Office of the Governor (RG3). See also Egerton, *Death or Liberty*, 261–263 and James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion and Identity in Gabriel’s Virginia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 41–43.

- 68 Peter Oram to William Moultrie, Aug. 16, 1793, Records of the General Assembly, Governor's Messages, 1783–1830 (no. 577–35, 39), South Carolina Department of Archives and History.
- 69 Robert Mitchell to J. Marshall Sept. 23, 1793, enclosed in Marshall to the Governor, Sept. 24, 1793, VC 6:547. E. Langham to the Governor, Aug. 3, 1793, VC 6:470.
- 70 Richard Cary to the Governor, Nov. 25, 1793, VC 6:651–652.
- 71 Loose Paper, Sept. 27, 1793, Records of the General Assembly, Governor's Messages, 1783–1830 (no. 577–11), South Carolina Department of Archives and History.
- 72 Rachel Hope Cleves, “‘Jacobins in This Country’: The United States, Great Britain, and Trans-Atlantic Anti-Jacobinism,” *Early American Studies* 8, no. 2 (2010): 410–445, Jonathan Den Hartog, “Trans-Atlantic Anti-Jacobinism: Reaction and Religion,” *Early American Studies* 11, no. 1 (2012): 133–145, Seth Cotlar, “The Federalists’ Transatlantic Cultural Offensive of 1798 and the Moderation of American Democratic Discourse,” in David Waldstreicher, Jeffrey L. Pasley, and Andrew W. Robertson, eds., *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill, 2004): 274–299.
- 73 William Lindsay to John Pemberton, Mar. 17, 1794, Gratz Collection, box 1, case 14, HSP.
- 74 William Cobbett, *Observations on the Emigration of Dr. Joseph Priestley, and on the Several Addresses Delivered to him on His Arrival at New-York* ([London] Philadelphia: re-printed for John Stockdale, 1794) 18, 20, 31. For Cobbett’s role in forging Anti-Jacobin ideas, see Marcus Leonard Daniel, *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of Democracy* (New York, 2009) 187–230.
- 75 Rachel Hope Cleves, “‘Hurtful to the State’: The Political Morality of Federalist Antislavery,” in Hammond and Mason, eds., *Contesting Slavery*, 207–226.
- 76 Thomas Cobbett, *A Bone to Gnaw, for the Democrats; or, Observations on a Pamphlet, Entitled, “The Political Progress of Britain.”* (Philadelphia: Thomas Bradford, for the purchasers, 1795) 35, 47.
- 77 (Philadelphia) *National Gazette* Oct. 26, 1793 (Philadelphia).
- 78 (Philadelphia) *Federal Gazette* Oct. 25, 1793 (New York, Oct. 24, “West Indies”).
- 79 (Philadelphia) *General Advertiser* Aug. 5, 1794 (“An Extract”).
- 80 (Philadelphia) *General Advertiser* Aug. 8, 1794 (“Slavery”).
- 81 Waldstreicher and Grossbart, “Abraham Bishop’s Vocation.”
- 82 Zieche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots*, 41–63.
- 83 Jefferson to James Monroe, Jul. 14, 1793, *TJP* 26:503.
- 84 Jefferson to Martha Jefferson Randolph, Dec. 1, 1793, *TJP* 27:467.
- 85 St. George Tucker, *A Dissertation on Slavery: With a Proposal for the Gradual Abolition of It, in the State of Virginia* (Philadelphia, 1796). Reprinted in Nash, *Race and Revolution*, 151–158 (quotations on 152, 158). Tucker moved from Bermuda to Virginia before the Revolution, served as a judge on the Virginia Superior Court of Appeals, was a professor of law at William and Mary, and studied there under George Wythe. His plan was derived from lectures given at the college. That his ideas were impacted by events in Saint Domingue is shown in a letter he wrote to Jeremy Belknap, a leading New England Congregational minister on June 29, 1795: “The calamities which have lately spread like a contagion through the West India islands afford a solemn warning to us of the dangerous predicament in which we stand.” Quoted in Nash, 44.
- 86 Jefferson to St. George Tucker, Aug. 28, 1797, *TJP* 9:417–18.
- 87 George Tucker, *A Letter to a Member of the General Assembly . . . with a Proposal for Colonization* (Baltimore, 1801). Reprinted in Nash, *Race and Revolution*, 159–163.
- 88 *Annals of Congress* (AOC) vol. 6, 1731 (Dec. 29, 1796).
- 89 AOC, vol. 8, 1306–1307 (Mar. 23, 1798).
- 90 AOC, vol. 10, 230, 240–1 (Jan. 2–3, 1800).

- 91 AOC, vol. 10, 240 (Jan. 3, 1800).
- 92 See, for example, the various expressions of Virginia Congressmen John Nicholas (AOC, vol. 6, 1735 and AOC, vol. 8, 1309), William Branch Giles (AOC, vol. 10, 687), and North Carolina's Nathaniel Macon AOC, vol. 8, 661.
- 93 AOC, vol. 10, 234. In this case, however, Dana was disagreeing with the specific arguments of Federalists such as Otis. He hoped that the petition from the Philadelphian free blacks would be accepted because it only dealt with issues that would ameliorate their conditions. The framework from which he was operating, however, was the same. His notions of natural rights for blacks were being muted in favor of a humanitarian concern for their treatment. This is a good example of the complicated process of elision in which Revolutionary antislavery was replaced by opposition to the slave trade, dealt with further below.
- 94 Gordon S. Brown, *Toussaint's Clause: The Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution* (Jackson, 2005).
- 95 AOC, vol. 10, 232 (Jan. 2, 1800).
- 96 James Forten to George Thatcher, Jan. 1800, Cox-Parrish-Wharton Collection, box 11, "Miscellaneous Correspondence Alphabetical by Author Ems-Hun," folder "Forten, James," HSP.
- 97 John Randolph to Joseph Nicholson, Sept. 26, 1800, as quoted in Douglas R. Egerton *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill, 1993) 102. Egerton's book and James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730-1810* (Cambridge, 1997) remain the best comprehensive treatments. For a careful discussion of French involvement and Monroe's activities, see Egerton, 82-85 and 102-04. Egerton's argument for Gabriel's egalitarian motives and Atlantic consciousness is made throughout the text, but see especially 40-49. Sidbury finds it unconvincing (see page 88, note 68). For a powerful evocation of this episode as a denial of the American Revolution's radical potential, see Egerton, *Death or Liberty*, 271-81.
- 98 *Philadelphia Gazette* Sept. 27, 1800 (The Philadelphia Gazette).
- 99 *Philadelphia Gazette* Sept. 29, 1800 (Fredericksburg, Sept. 23).
- 100 *Philadelphia Gazette* Sept. 27, 1800 (VIRGINIA: a vision).
- 101 For examples of attacks on Jefferson using *Notes*, see *Philadelphia Gazette* Sept. 5 and 6, 1800 ("THE PRETENSIONS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON TO THE PRESIDENCY, EXAMINED"). The thrust of many of these writings was an effort to expose Jefferson as an atheist, or at least as having unorthodox and questionable Christian beliefs. See Robert M. S. McDonald, "Was There a Religious Revolution in 1800?" in Horn, Lewis, and Onuf, eds., *The Revolution of 1800*, 173-198.
- 102 John M. Murrin, "The Jeffersonian Triumph and American Exceptionalism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 20, no. 1 (2000): 1-25, James Sidbury, "Thomas Jefferson in Gabriel's Virginia," in James Horn, Jan Ellen Lewis and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race, and the New Republic* (Charlottesville, 2002): 199-219.
- 103 AOC, vol. 9, 2752. (Jan. 22, 1799).
- 104 Laurent Dubois, "'Troubled Water': Rebellion and Republicanism in the Revolutionary French Caribbean," in Horn, Lewis, and Onuf, eds., *The Revolution of 1800*, 291-308.
- 105 Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 250-301.
- 106 Jefferson to Rufus King, Jul. 13, 1802, Andrew A. Lipscomb, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, 1903) 10:326-327. Jefferson was pursuing a request from the Virginia Assembly that slaves involved in the insurrection plot be sent to Sierre Leone. While the leaders had been executed, these slaves "are not felons, or common malefactors, but persons guilty of what the safety of society, under actual circumstances, obliges us to treat as a crime, but which their feelings may represent in a far different shape."

- 107 Jefferson to Monroe, Nov. 24, 1801, *TJP* 35:720. See also Douglas R. Egerton, “‘Its Origin Is Not a Little Curious’: A New Look at the American Colonization Society,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 5 (1985): 463–480.
- 108 Tim Matthewson, “Jefferson and Haiti,” *The Journal of Southern History* 61 (1995): 209–248; Brown, *Toussaint’s Clause*.
- 109 Peter S. Onuf, “‘To Declare Them a Free and Independent People’: Race, Slavery, and National Identity in Jefferson’s Thought,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 18 (1998): 1–46.
- 110 Jefferson to Monroe, Nov. 24, 1801, *TJP* 35:720.
- 111 AOC, vol. 13, 999. (Feb. 14, 1804).
- 112 AOC, vol. 12, 472 (Feb. 7, 1803).
- 113 Quoted in Sidbury, “Thomas Jefferson in Gabriel’s Virginia” 206.
- 114 For example, AOC vol. 13, 995–6 and 1003.
- 115 Robert L. Paquette, “Revolutionary Saint Domingue in the Making of Territorial Louisiana,” in Gaspar and Geggus, eds., *A Turbulent Time*, 204–225.
- 116 John Craig Hammond, *Slavery, Freedom, and Expansion in the Early American West* (Charlottesville, 2007), Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge, 2007).
- 117 Sidbury, “Thomas Jefferson in Gabriel’s Virginia” 206.
- 118 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE WAR OF 1812 AND THE STRUGGLE FOR A CONTINENT

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Alan Taylor

By conventional definition, the War of 1812 pitted the United States against the British Empire, began with a congressional declaration in June 1812, and ended with a treaty of peace in December 1814. That narrowly legalistic framing obscures the messy and bloody beginnings and endings of the conflict in frontier scrambles for land. The pinched definition of the conflict also trivializes the Battle of New Orleans in January 1815 as some sort of silly communication problem and temporal mistake because allegedly fought after the war was over. And ultimately, the narrow view insists that the war produced a stalemate with scant consequences.

The focus on the war as waged by two sovereign nations obscures the salience of native peoples and fiercely independent settlers and rogue generals on the frontier. Historians commonly write of “the Americans” acting collectively under the secure leadership of a purposeful national government. In fact, expansion revealed the weakness of national leaders, who had to scramble to claim authority over actions initiated by aggressive actors on the margins of a vast and diffuse country. Henry Clay noted that events in the West often displayed “the spectacle of a people at war and a government at peace.” President James Madison preferred the diplomatic high ground of negotiations, but he often had to make the best of the hash that his generals and settlers made of relations with Spain and the natives. By trying to dispossess squatters or rebuke rogue generals, the national leaders could only fail, revealing their impotence. Instead, the national administrations sought to exploit the turmoil along the southern frontier to pressure the Spanish into forsaking Florida. In the process, the government won far more popularity than it ever could have by fully adhering to international law.¹

The conventional view of the war focuses on the American invasion of Canada and the British counterattacks on the Middle Atlantic, as well as a few daring but strategically insignificant frigate battles at sea. That conventional perspective neglects the southwestern theater of the war, where violent episodes get bracketed as something different and distinct: as the annexation of West Florida in 1810 and 1813; the Patriot War in East Florida in 1812–1813; the Creek War in the future Alabama in 1813–1814; and Andrew Jackson’s forays into Spanish Florida in 1814 and 1818. During the 1810s, American aggression was not confined to Canada and, indeed,

proved far more successful in the south. In all of these conflicts, the common denominator was the American drive to disrupt British alliances with native peoples living along the American frontiers. Rather than expressing the confidence of so-called Manifest Destiny, the imperialism of the early republic was highly defensive, driven by a fear of containment by native peoples supported by the British Empire and its ally, Spain.²

From 1810 through 1819, the United States waged an interconnected set of frontier conflicts that included the War of 1812. This temporal broadening of the war gives the Battle of New Orleans in 1815 its proper place at the center of the story. Far from being marginal, Jackson's great victory proved pivotal to American expansion and to the British diplomatic shift toward accommodating the republic. The broader war of 1810–1819 transformed the geopolitics of North America by consolidating American predominance. The Spanish forsook Florida while the British retreated behind the Canadian border. Both empires abandoned their Indian allies, who lost their crucial suppliers of modern weaponry. Never again would natives within American bounds enjoy a powerful European ally to help even the odds against them. Thereafter, native resistance to American expansions could never achieve more than localized and short-term success. Within the temperate latitudes, the United States secured continental domination during the longer War of 1812—which was far more significant than usually recognized.

REVOLUTION

On the eve of the American Revolution, colonial settlers burst through the Appalachian Mountains to settle the vast and fertile interior drained by the Mississippi river system. When war erupted between the American Patriots and the British Empire, most of the native nations made a common cause with the British to drive the settlers back by attacking the new settlements in Tennessee, Kentucky, and western Pennsylvania. But the British lost the war and, in the peace treaty of 1783, offered exceptionally generous terms to the victorious new republic. Forsaking their Indian allies, who had fought so hard to defend their lands, the British cast them within the bounds of the new republic, which extended westward to the Mississippi, north to the Great Lakes, and south to Spanish-held Florida.³

The peace treaty and new American borders outraged the Indian allies as a shocking betrayal by their British allies. Unrepresented at the treaty negotiations, the natives denied that the British had any right to transfer their villages into American control. A British frontier officer reported that the Indians protested that they “were a free People subject to no Power upon Earth, that they were faithful allies of the King of England, but not his Subjects—that he had no right Whatever to grant away to the States of America, their Rights or Properties.”⁴

During the 1780s and 1790s, American expansion westward accelerated. The United States depended on the continued extension of family farms producing for the market and integrated into the republic's political structure. Expansion built the nation's wealth and population, and bolstered the clout that the new union needed to control its diverse member states. The federal government also relied on the sale of public lands to generate revenue. In addition, expansion promoted social peace between the classes by providing an outlet for poor families seeking land. Without

territorial expansion into Indian country, American leaders dreaded that some combination of class conflict, civil war, or foreign meddling would destroy the volatile new republic. Only the continued consumption of Indian land to make private property could sustain the American social order that combined social inequality with frontier opportunity.⁵

In addition to angering the natives, that westward expansion alarmed the republic's imperial neighbors: the British to the north in Canada, and the Spanish to the south and west in Florida and Louisiana. Their colonies were vulnerable because thinly populated with colonists, so imperial officials watched with alarm as American settlements grew with a remarkable rapidity. About 3.7 million in 1790, the republic's population would double during the next twenty-five years. And the population was shifting westward. From just 12,000 in 1783, Kentucky's population exploded to 73,000 in 1790 and to 221,000 in 1800. In 1793, the colonial governor of Louisiana, Baron de Carondelet, warned his superiors in Spain to beware of

the unmeasured ambition of a new people, who are vigorous, hostile to all subjection, and who have been uniting and multiplying . . . with a remarkable rapidity from the time of the recognized independence of the United States. . . . This vast and restless population, driving the Indian tribes continually before them and upon us, is endeavoring to gain all the vast continent occupied by the Indians between the Ohio and Misisipi Rivers, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Appalachian Mountains.

Colonial officials worried that, after rolling over the Indians in the Mississippi Valley, the settler tide would sweep into the Spanish and British colonies to complete the American domination of the continent.⁶

By promoting buffer zones of Indian allies, imperial officials sought to slow the advance of American settlements. In the southeast, the Spanish armed the Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw nations, which shared the Spanish interest in halting American expansion. To the north, the British similarly sustained an alliance with the native peoples on the southern shores of the Great Lakes within the boundaries of the United States. After losing the American Revolution, a British agent explained, "We are no longer the first landed power in North America. Therefore [we] cannot have too many Indians under our protection and countenance." An American territorial governor, William Hull, concluded, "The British cannot hold Upper Canada without the assistance of the Indians," but the "Indians cannot conduct a war without the assistance of a civilized nation." The British and the natives needed one another, in contrast to the Americans who wanted to dispossess the Indians.⁷

The United States benefitted from the European entanglements of their imperial rivals. In 1793, Britain and Spain became embroiled in a massive new war against the French. Both empires had to give higher priority to fighting in Europe and the West Indies, eclipsing their interests in North America. At the same time, the United States became stronger with the consolidation of a new federal government which defeated the Indians of the Ohio country and suppressed a western tax resistance—both in 1794. The imperial governments backed away from their confrontational policies in North America as dangerous and expensive distractions. In the Jay Treaty of late 1794, the British reconciled with the United States by withdrawing from their

border posts on American territory along the southern shores of the Great Lakes. In the 1795 Treaty of San Lorenzo, the Spanish also sought better relations with the United States by retreating within a constricting border, the 31st parallel, abandoning their fort and settlements in the Natchez District. The Spanish also opened up the Mississippi River to free American trade. The British and Spanish concessions avoided an American war but compromised the native buffer zones.⁸

Weary of the large administrative costs and scant revenues from Louisiana, the Spanish government restored the colony to the French in late 1800. The Spanish hoped that, in French hands, Louisiana could provide a more formidable barrier between the Americans and Mexico: Spain's most precious colony to the southwest. Within three years, however, the deceptive and ruthless new French emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, soured on his acquisition. He had lost the means to occupy it with the destruction of his colonial army by yellow fever and guerrilla warfare in a failed attempt to suppress a massive slave revolt in Saint Domingue (now Haiti) in the West Indies. Betraying his promise to the Spanish, in 1803 Napoleon sold Louisiana for \$15 million to the American administration of Thomas Jefferson. The transfer nearly doubled the United States, which claimed that the new territory extended at least to the Rocky Mountains and perhaps to the Pacific. At their most brazen, American leaders also included Texas and West Florida in their Louisiana claim.⁹

WAR

Napoleon forsook Louisiana so quickly because he feared losing it to seizure by the powerful Royal Navy of the British Empire. That navy also provoked the Jefferson administration by enforcing a strict blockade of Napoleon's empire and its colonies, thereby disrupting a profitable trade for American merchants. Worse still, the British naval captains forcibly "impressed" sailors from defenseless American merchant ships. Shorthanded in their crews, the captains claimed the right to force any sailors deemed British by birth to serve in the Royal Navy. Many of the impressed claimed to be Americans by birth or naturalization, so the United States government protested. Contemptuous of the weak American navy, the British refused to negotiate away their "maritime rights" to reclaim supposed subjects and to enforce a vigorous blockade on neutral ships. The American government and Republican press regarded the British adamancy as an insult to national sovereignty.¹⁰

In 1807, the increasingly acrimonious diplomatic exchanges and heated rhetoric in Republican newspapers led the British reluctantly to prepare for war in the Great Lakes country. With their hands full fighting Napoleon around the world, the British did not want a war in America, but they also would not budge on impressment, deeming it essential to their naval power and global commerce. The crisis induced the British to revitalize their alliance with native peoples south of the Great Lakes within the United States as a defensive contingency in the event of war. At their forts in Upper Canada (now Ontario), British officers wooed visiting Indian chiefs with gifts of food, firearms, and ammunition. At these gatherings, the chiefs and officers took the measure of one another by exchanging formal speeches and private consultations. Prior to 1812, the British counseled restraint, lest the Indians provoke a frontier war which the British still hoped to avoid as an expensive distraction from their pressing priority: to fight the French Empire. The British performed a delicate

balancing act, for they wanted to prepare the natives for war but to keep them in check until that conflict erupted. Most natives reluctantly heeded the British advice, but some warriors lashed out at new American settlements in Indiana, butchering cattle, stealing horses, and sometimes killing settler families.¹¹

The British treated the Indians as autonomous peoples dwelling in their own country *between* the empire and the republic—and thereby free to make their own alliances. But Americans insisted that the natives should be their dependants living within a fixed boundary separating British from American sovereignty. Loath to recognize Indian initiative (or British caution), American officials regarded natives as pawns in an insidious British plot to ravage the frontier. Journalists for the governing Republican party recycled the canard that British agents paid bounties to Indians for scalps taken from American heads.¹²

Republican officials sought to convert Indians from warriors to farmers and thereby wean them from seeking British arms and ammunition. By breaking down Indian sovereignty and cultures, President Jefferson (and, after 1808, his successor James Madison) sought to absorb them into American society as farm families without tribal identities or allegiances. Jefferson's vision alarmed natives proud of their autonomy and traditions and of the martial presents that they could extract from the British. The prospect of becoming American-style farmers horrified warriors as emasculating, for women cultivated the crops in Indian villages.¹³

By transforming Indians, Jefferson sought more land for American settlers. He reasoned that, as American-style farmers fixed to small farms, natives would need less land than as roaming hunters. On Jefferson's orders, the territorial governors of Indiana and Michigan pressured natives to cede millions of acres for a mere penny or two per acre. William Henry Harrison of Indiana was especially relentless, resourceful, and ruthless. He negotiated land cession treaties with older chiefs representing smaller tribes or minorities, outraging most of the Indians, especially the younger warriors, who rallied to the leadership of two Shawnee brothers, Tenskwatawa, a religious prophet, and Tecumseh, a charismatic war-chief. Rejecting Harrison's treaties, the brothers vowed armed resistance and gathered their supporters at Prophetstown, in the Wabash Valley of northern Indiana. In November 1811, Harrison invaded the Indian country to destroy Prophetstown after a bloody battle at nearby Tippecanoe Creek.¹⁴

President Madison and the Republican press endorsed Harrison's claims that Tippecanoe was a great and glorious victory over bloodthirsty savages armed by the British. Madison sought a popular military victory to help prepare the republic for war against the empire. While the British regarded their alliance with native peoples along the Great Lakes as a defensive measure against American aggression, the Republicans perceived the alliance as a provocative violation of national sovereignty. As an ironic consequence, that British-native alliance became a prime American cause for declaring a war that the British never wanted.¹⁵

The new Speaker of the House of Representatives, Henry Clay, vigorously supported Madison's call to prepare for war. From the frontier state of Kentucky, Clay urged an American conquest of Canada to "extinguish the torch that lights up savage warfare." He rallied other bellicose Republicans known as "War Hawks" to push for a declaration of war in June 1812. Support for the war primarily came from the Republican strongholds in Pennsylvania, the South, and the new western states of Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee.¹⁶

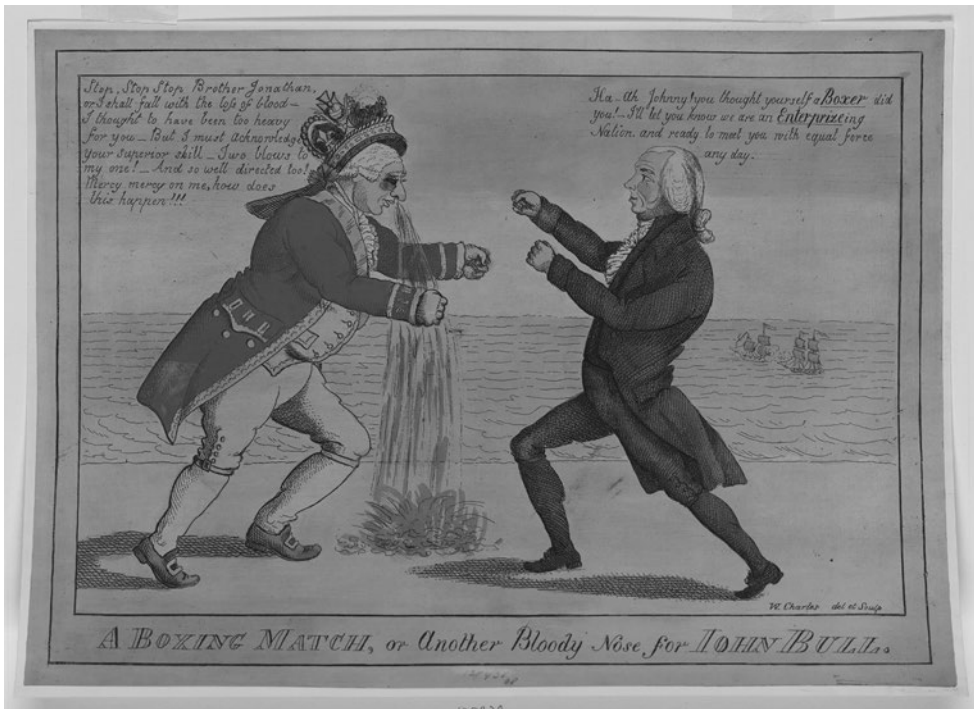


Figure 11.1 This print from 1813 celebrates American naval victories over Britain during the War of 1812 and provides the more traditional view of the war, as one fought primarily between Britain and the United States over issues of commerce and sailors' rights. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppmsca-10754.

Historians have long debated the primary cause for the declaration of war. Early in the twentieth century, some stressed the longing of western politicians to conquer Canada. These historians quoted the provocative anti-war speech by John Randolph of Virginia: "Agrarian cupidity, not maritime right, urges the war. . . . we have heard but one word—like the whip-poor-will, but one eternal monotonous tone—Canada! Canada! Canada!" But subsequent historians discount the strength of western interests and the supposed drive to seize Canada and, instead, emphasize anger over the British meddling with American ships and sailors.¹⁷

In fact, the Republicans went to war over a package of grievances, which included anger over the British alliance with Indians, as well as the maritime issues. The Republican bill of indictment moved from the most commercial and abstract grievance to the most visceral and bloody. For example, in upstate New York a Republican meeting denounced "British spoliations, British impressments, British intrigues with the Indians, and British murders." In building to an emotional climax, the sum was greater than the parts. The declaration of war expressed a *synergy* of multiple grievances in which the most forceful and emotional involved fear and loathing for the British alliance with the Indians.¹⁸

Throughout America, not just in the west, Republican rhetoric dwelled on bodily violation by savage knives and tomahawks. In January 1812, a Republican meeting



Figure 11.2 This print from 1812 shows how important the battles in North America were in the War of 1812. The print conveys the struggle to control the eastern portion of the North American continent and the American understanding of Indians' central role in the hostilities.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppmsca-31111.

in New York warned, “we see the infernal engines set in motion by the agents of Great Britain and the bloody tomahawk & Scalping knife suspended over our heads reeking with the blood of our Citizens.” Orators expressed a pervasive anxiety that American men were failing to defend their women and children from bloody violation by another race.¹⁹

By attacking British Canada, the Republicans invited American men to fulfill their patriarchal duty to protect frontier families. Congressman Felix Grundy of Tennessee predicted, “We shall drive the British from our Continent—they will no longer have an opportunity of intriguing with our Indian neighbors, and setting on the ruthless savage to tomahawk our women and children.” Waving the bloody petticoat best served the Republican drive to rally common men to support the war.²⁰

The Republicans sought to conquer Canada as the means to a more important end: to break up the British-native alliance which threatened to block westward expansion. To render the war popular, Jefferson advised Madison that he needed, above all, “to stop Indian barbarities. The conquest of Canada will do this.” In the War of 1812, American troops tried to win the West by conquering the North.²¹

But some southern Republicans worried that annexing Canada would strengthen the North with new states, thereby weakening the South in the Union's precarious balance of regional power. In May 1812, James Bayard of Delaware reported,

“No proposition could have been more frightful to the southern men, and it seems they had never thought of what they were to do with Canada before, in case they conquered the country.” A loose confederation of regions, the union seemed too fragile to stand expansion in only one direction. But Congress dithered, preferring ambiguity rather than defining either the conquest of Florida or Canada as explicit national goals. Indecision papered over Republican sectional divisions and kept their options open pending the fortunes of war. Should the northern conquest prove easy and popular, many Republicans (including Clay) expected to keep at least Upper Canada. But other Republicans hoped to cash in their conquest as a bargaining chip in a peace treaty, restoring Canada to Britain in exchange for maritime concessions.²²

By declaring war on Britain, the Republicans hoped to unite the country and smash the opposition party: the Federalists. But the popular aversion to taxes locked the Republicans into waging a land war, which they assumed would be cheaper than building a competitive navy. A land war, however, meant invading Canada, which renewed the Republicans’ contradictions with a vengeance. On the one hand, many longed to evict the British from the continent to guarantee the nation’s northern security and westward expansion. On the other hand, annexing Canada worried many Republicans, especially in the south, as a menace to republican values and a threat to the union’s regional balance of power.

Republicans expected a quick, easy, and cheap conquest. They reasoned that the 7.7 million Americans would rapidly overwhelm the 300,000 British subjects in Canada. Clay insisted that “the militia of Kentucky are alone competent to place Montreal and Upper Canada at our feet.” Jefferson declared that “the acquisition of Canada, this year, as far as the neighborhood of Quebec, will be a mere matter of marching” and would lead, a year later, to “the final expulsion of England from the American continent.”²³

In 1812, Major General Sir Isaac Brock led the defense of Upper Canada. Short on regular troops and reliable militia, Brock needed Indian allies to secure his vast and thinly settled province. Appealing to natives on both sides of the Great Lakes, Brock’s agents offered lavish gifts of food and weapons. To sway the Indians, in mid-July Brock also sent Captain Charles Roberts with a mixed force of regulars, Canadian boat-men, and native warriors to overwhelm the unprepared American garrison at Michilimackinac.²⁴

The British had won a victory with immense consequences. If distant and marginal from a coastal view, Michilimackinac was central and pivotal from a continental perspective. An island at the confluence of Lake Michigan and Lake Huron, Michilimackinac lay at the strategic heart of a nexus of native peoples and the fur trade. By seizing that fort, the British confirmed their native alliance, for British initiative and resolve stood in marked contrast to American weakness and bungling. That impression helped the British to rally the Indians throughout the Great Lakes Country. An American Indian agent warned, “There is no calculating on the friendship of the Indians after the loss of Michilimackinac.” By swinging most of the Indians decisively into the British alliance, the defeat staggered the American bid to invade Canada. Seizing the initiative, Brock led a small force of regulars and Canadian volunteers supplemented by many native warriors to seize Detroit, the main American base on the Great Lakes, in mid-August.²⁵

In 1812, the Americans sought to conquer Upper Canada in order to disrupt the British alliance with Indians around the Great Lakes, but the campaign ended with a British conquest of Michigan that deepened the British dependence on their Indian allies. Instead of shifting north, the border was pushed south. Worse still, the Indians along the Great Lakes had swung decisively into the British alliance. Their frontier raids put the Americans on the defensive in Ohio and the Indiana Territory.²⁶

Knowing their importance, the Indians meant to dominate their alliance with the British in occupied Michigan. At Michilimackinac, the chiefs told a British officer “that without them he could never have got up there, pointing to the Fort and . . . that the Future possession of the Fort depended upon them.” The Indians expected the British to keep the captured forts as bases for raids on the exposed American settlements to the south in Indiana and Ohio. The natives wanted no peace until the British-Indian alliance had pushed the Americans all the way back to the Ohio River, restoring the Indian country of 1783.²⁷

Thanks to the northern frontier’s wretched roads, dense forests, and Indian warriors, the British defense had the advantage over the American offensive. To break the stalemate, the Americans needed to win control of the Great Lakes by building more and better warships than the British could. With supremacy on the lakes, the American forces could move their troops and supplies more rapidly and could intercept the supplies received by the enemy. On Lake Ontario, the British shipbuilders preserved the stalemate by matching the Americans warship for warship. But on Lake Erie, to the west, the Americans won the shipbuilders’ race during the summer of 1813. Securing Lake Erie became the top American priority in the west because, as the Secretary of the Navy explained, “it at once erects a Naval barrier between our civilised and savage Enemies from Niagara to Michigan.”²⁸

On September 10, a naval victory by Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry’s vessels enabled William Henry Harrison to cross Lake Erie with an American army to land in western Upper Canada. The local British commander, General Henry Procter, retreated up the Thames River. Resenting the withdrawal as a British betrayal, two-thirds of the Indians dispersed to their homes around the Great Lakes. Only a third, led by Tecumseh, reluctantly joined Procter’s retreat. Harrison’s army overtook Procter’s force at Moraviantown on October 5. Outnumbered two to one, the British and Indian force collapsed under the American attack, which killed Tecumseh. Rather than pursue the survivors, Harrison cautiously withdrew to Detroit, where he made peace with the Indians who had deserted from Procter and Tecumseh.²⁹

Thanks to Perry’s victory on the lake and Harrison’s beside the river, the Americans had recovered southern Michigan and pacified the nearby Indian nations. Tecumseh’s death devastated his dream of uniting the Indian nations in a confederacy that, in alliance with the British, could roll back the American settlements all the way to the Ohio River. Thereafter, the Americans could more easily conquer the Indians by dividing their nations.³⁰

In 1814, the Americans invaded Upper Canada via the Niagara Peninsula but ultimately faltered, retreating back to their side of the Niagara River at the end of the campaign. After two-and-a-half years of bloody trying, the American invasion of Canada had failed. But conquering Canada had always been a means to another end: disrupting the British alliance with Indians within the United States. By killing

Tecumseh and winning the Battle of the Thames in October 1813, the Americans promoted their primary goal: a free hand to divide and dispossess the Indians within their own border.³¹

JACKSON

In the South, the war even more fully realized American aspirations to devastate native resistance while eliminating British and Spanish influence in Indian country. At the start of the war, the Spanish held both West and East Florida, maintaining garrisons at Mobile, St. Marks, Pensacola, and St. Augustine. Because Napoleon's armies had invaded and occupied Spain, the Spanish colonial officials depended on British protection and trade goods to sustain alliances with the Creek Indians just north of Florida. But, as in the northern theater, the British and Spanish relationship with southern Indians helped to provoke the Americans into waging war.³²

Eager to extend the slave and plantation complex across the Deep South, Americans dreaded the haven that Spanish Florida provided for runaway slaves, who founded maroon communities among their Creek and Seminole hosts. The maroon settlements enticed more slaves to escape and might, Southerners feared, promote a massive and bloody slave revolt. Tennessee's leading politician and militia general, Andrew Jackson, longed to dispossess the native peoples and conquer the Spanish Floridas in the name of fighting the British. Writing to the governor of Louisiana, Jackson explained: "I hope the government will permit us to traverse the Southern coast and aid in planting the American eagles on the ramparts of Mobile, Pensacola and Fort St. Augustine. . . . British influence must be destroyed, or we will have the whole Southern tribe of Indians to fight and [slave] insurrections to quell in all the Southern states." Dreading a combination of British invasion, Indian raids, and slave revolts, Jackson wanted to conquer Florida to secure the Deep South for cotton plantations worked by slaves.³³

In 1812, the Madison administration balked at directly attacking Spanish Florida as contrary to the nation's pretensions to respectability in European diplomacy. But the president and his secretary of state, James Monroe, feared being left behind by aggressive southern filibusterers bent on seizing Florida. The administration preferred an irregular conquest of Florida to the apparent alternative: a British seizure that would open a southern front in the war against the republic. Rather than be left behind by local or British action, the American leaders tried to assert some authority by embracing the southern expansionists.³⁴

General George Mathews of Georgia claimed that he had secret orders from Madison and Monroe to raise a volunteer army of "Patriots" to "liberate" the Floridas. With support from the American military force based along the East Florida border, the Patriots seized Amelia Island in March 1812. They then advanced south to besiege St. Augustine, the strongly fortified capital of East Florida, where the Patriot advance stalled, embarrassing the Madison administration. After disavowing Mathews as a rogue operative, Monroe appointed a new agent, Governor David Mitchell of Georgia, to direct the Patriot advance. While Patriots played the bad cops, Secretary of State James Monroe and agent Mitchell offered to help the Spanish out of their dilemma by negotiating their peaceful withdrawal to Cuba. But the Spanish rallied support from Seminole Indians and black maroons, whose raids harassed the Patriots' supply line and compelled their retreat in disarray to Georgia

during the spring of 1813. Forsaking the Patriot operation against East Florida, the Madison administration settled for sending troops in April to seize another chunk of West Florida including the fort and town at Mobile. For the time being, the Spanish retained the land east of the Perdido River, including Apalachicola, Pensacola, and St. Marks.³⁵

But the American advance faced fierce resistance by the Creeks, who dwelled north of Mobile in the Alabama Territory. In 1811, Tecumseh had visited them in hopes of expanding his Indian confederation to the South. Although most Creek chiefs held back from fear of suffering from the American military power to devastate their villages, his visit helped to galvanize young militants known as “Red Sticks,” who adhered to shamans who urged a cultural revitalization of traditional ceremonies. The shamans and militants sought to purge their villages of chiefs (and their supporters) who accommodated the American demands for land and promoted private property in land, including plantations worked by slave labor. In August 1813, Red Sticks attacked and overwhelmed the American Fort Mims near the confluence of the Tombigbee and Alabama Rivers. The victors killed most of the soldiers and settlers while sparing their enslaved blacks.³⁶

Describing their defeat as a massacre by savages, the southern Americans invaded the Creek country to attack the Red Stick towns. General Jackson rallied men by an appeal to patriarchy, for he warned that the Creeks meant to “advance towards your frontier with their scalping knife unsheathed, to butcher your wives, your children, and your helpless babes.” The Tennesseans and Georgians also recruited support among some Creeks, as well as Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Choctaw warriors who wanted to mollify the dominant power in the region. In late 1813, southern forces devastated the Red Stick towns of Tallasahatchee, Talladega, Little Ocfuskee, Autosee, Econochaka, and Emuckfau.³⁷

In March 1814, Jackson’s forces trapped 1,000 Red Sticks at Tohopeka, on a horseshoe-shaped bend in the Tallapoosa River. After setting fire to the village, Jackson’s men killed almost all of the natives: men, women, and children. “How lamentable it is that the path to peace should lead through blood & over the carcass of the slain!! But it is in the dispensations of that providence which inflicts partial evil, to produce general good.” By general good, he meant a future landscape “of elegant mansions, and extensive rich & productive farms” belonging to white men who owned enslaved blacks.³⁸

The victory crushed the rebellion and enabled Jackson to dictate harsh terms, paid by his Creek allies as well as by the Red Sticks. At the August 1814 Treaty of Fort Jackson, General Jackson secured twenty-three million acres: a bit more than half of the Creek domain and more land than the American government had instructed him to seek. Almost all of the Creek signers had supported the United States during the war. They signed under duress, for Jackson threatened to attack their villages if they refused. The cession bifurcated the remaining Creek domain to provide a road meant to facilitate both military logistics and a settler invasion. The cession also deprived the Creeks of their southern tier to isolate them from the Spanish and British allies in Florida. “*We will* run a line between our friends and our enemies,” Jackson assured the Creeks.³⁹

About 2,000 Red Sticks escaped the devastation to join their Seminole relatives in Florida. During the summer of 1814, the refugees received military assistance

from the Royal Navy, which operated out of the Spanish colonial port of Pensacola and from a base on the Apalachicola River. The British also recruited and armed runaway slaves from Georgia—which, of course, especially outraged Jackson and other southern leaders. Acting without orders from his own government, Jackson attacked and captured Pensacola in November. After dispersing the British, Spanish, and their allies, Jackson withdrew his force westward to bolster the defenses of New Orleans.⁴⁰

In late December, 6,000 British troops advanced up the Mississippi to menace New Orleans, but Jackson's army blocked their way behind earthworks constructed by slave labor and bristling with cannon. On January 8, the British foolishly attacked the strong position, suffering over 1,500 casualties compared to a mere 71 for Jackson's dug-in army. Contrary to legend, the battle was not waged after peace had been completed, for the United States Senate would not ratify until February 17 the provisional treaty completed in Europe on December 24. After crushing and dispossessing the Creeks, and humiliating the Spanish at Pensacola, Jackson had culminated the triumphant southern dimension of the War of 1812 with his massive victory over the British at New Orleans.⁴¹

Jackson's one-sided victory had an enormous psychological and cultural impact on both Americans and Britons for the next generation. After suffering many northern defeats and the burning of the national capitol, Americans vigorously celebrated the battle as proof that ultimately they had won a glorious war. Their nationalism assumed a more boisterous and assertive tone. Britons, however, felt deflated by that defeat, which confirmed the lessons of Saratoga and Yorktown from the previous war: that invaders risked destruction within the United States. Because Jackson's victory emboldened Americans and chastened Britons, that battle enabled the United States to turn the ambiguous peace treaty to great advantage.⁴²

ARTICLE NINE

Historians tend to discount the Treaty of Ghent because it changed no border and did not address the maritime causes that contributed to the war. But we should not be fooled by its leaden and legal language into treating the treaty as a definitive contract that bound both parties to its literal terms. In fact, like any treaty, its meaning became what the parties made of it in the aftermath. The treaty's ultimate meaning emerged as the Americans and Britons competed to define its ambiguities to suit their interests. The true meaning of the Treaty of Ghent became what the Americans could get away with and what the British could live with. During a subsequent five-year period of jockeying and contention over the treaty, the Americans belatedly won the so-called War of 1812 and did so decisively on the twin issues that mattered most to them: expansion at the expense of native peoples and the suppression of maroon communities formed by escaped slaves.

During the summer and fall of 1814, British and American negotiators had met at Ghent in Belgium to seek an end to the war. Strengthened by their Canadian victories, the British initially sought major territorial concessions from the Americans, including eastern Maine and northern Michigan. To satisfy their native allies and bolster Canada's defenses against American expansion, the British also wanted to create an Indian buffer zone between the Great Lakes and the Ohio settlements.⁴³

The British cast the natives as sovereign allies who warranted British protection against greedy American settlers, speculators, and officials, but the American diplomats bristled at any buffer zone as a violation of their national sovereignty. Henry Clay denounced “the absurdity” of Britain protecting “savage tribes, scattered over our acknowledged territory.” He derided the Indians as a few roaming hunters hoarding fertile lands better owned and worked by American farmers. The British negotiator Henry Goulburn remarked, “I had, till I came here, no idea of the fixed determination which prevails in the breast of every American to extirpate the Indians and appropriate their territory.” There would be no peace unless the British abandoned their Indian allies to American domination and dispossession.⁴⁴

During the late fall, the British negotiating position weakened as the imperial government worried that a deteriorating diplomatic situation in Europe would renew war there. Eager to bring British troops home from North America, the government directed its diplomats at Ghent to offer a sweet deal to the Americans: a restoration of the territories the British had conquered during the war: primarily eastern Maine and northern Michigan. In return, the Americans had to accept that the treaty would remain silent about the maritime issues that had helped to provoke the war.⁴⁵

Renouncing the provocative Indian buffer zone, the British instead accepted an article (the ninth) restoring their native allies “to all the rights, privileges, and territories which they enjoyed in the year 1811.” The American diplomats recognized that this vague language would not protect the Indians in the future. Albert Gallatin assured Monroe: “I really think that there is nothing but [the] nominal in the Indian article as adopted.” A British official later conceded that the Americans could fulfill Article Nine merely by allowing the Indians “to return to their former Situation for a week or a month.” By settling for the hollow Article Nine, the British diplomats forsook their Indian allies, as they had done after the last war in 1783. When apprised of the treaty, a Lakota chief, Little Crow, angrily rebuked the British officers: “After we have fought for you, endured many hardships, lost some of our people and awakened the vengeance of our powerful neighbours, you make peace for yourselves, leaving us to obtain such terms as we can.”⁴⁶

After ratifying the Treaty of Ghent, the United States moved aggressively to subordinate the Indians in the Great Lakes and to separate them from their British allies. During the summer of 1815, American officials convened the Great Lakes chiefs in treaty councils to make peace. Although the Americans adhered to the letter of Article Nine by demanding no new land cessions, the treaty commissioners pressured the Indians to ratify disputed cessions made before the war. Such cessions served the American plan to push settlers onto disputed lands between Ohio and Detroit. The American Secretary of War explained, “It is an object of the first importance to the nation, with a view to any future war which may occur with the British Empire, that the settlements of the state of Ohio should be connected with those in the Michigan Territory, with the least possible delay.”⁴⁷

In pressuring the Indian chiefs, the American commissioners boasted of their new military power and denigrated the British as weak and defeated. Emphasizing Jackson’s great victory at New Orleans, the commissioners argued that the Indians must look only to the American president, and not to the British king, as their lone protector. Invoking the terrible name of the “Merciless Jackson . . . as the Instrument of

Vengeance,” the commissioners threatened the Indians with destruction if they resisted the American demands in the vain hope of British help.⁴⁸

The American treaty commissioners also announced plans to construct new forts deep within Indian country: on the upper Mississippi River and along the western shore of Lake Michigan. An American official explained, “This is the time to expel the British entirely from the Indian country.” By demonstrating American domination, the new forts refuted British claims that the Indians remained sovereign peoples.⁴⁹

Begun during the summer of 1816, the forts enforced a new American law banning foreigners from trading with Indians within the American border. When a British diplomat complained, John Quincy Adams replied, “A bitter experience of thirty years had proved that all the Indian Wars . . . had been kindled by the pestilential breath of British agents and Traders.” By enforcing an American trade monopoly within the border, the United States tried to exclude British influence from the Indian country. Delighted by the new law and new forts, the governor of the Michigan Territory, Lewis Cass, exulted, “A very few years more will present an iron frontier which [will] laugh to scorn the combined efforts of British & Indians.”⁵⁰

To resist the new forts and trade restrictions, the Indian chiefs appealed to British officers for military help. Sympathizing with the natives, the British officers along the Great Lakes denounced the Americans for violating Article Nine and thereby compromising Canada’s security. Lieutenant Colonel Robert McDouall warned his superiors that “the whole of the Western Indians” would soon be “completely hemmed in, thoroughly in the power of the Americans, & their assistance [to Britain] in any future war *hopeless*.” Without their help, McDouall doubted that Canada could repel the next American invasion.⁵¹

But the imperial government wanted no new war in North America, preferring to keep open the profitable American market for British exports of manufactures. Moreover, after a generation of expensive, global war against Napoleon, the British public and leaders sought to reduce taxes and the national debt. With the military debacle at New Orleans seared in their memories, the British also balked at any renewed war deep within North America. In 1816, the imperial government directed its Great Lakes officers to stand down and advise the chiefs to make their peace with American domination. A British officer had to explain to the chiefs: “I have my Great Father’s orders to obey and all the Indians in the universe will not make me deviate from them.” By enforcing their version of the border, and rupturing the British alliance with the Great Lakes Indians, the Americans had won the War of 1812 in the West.⁵²

FLORIDA

To the South, the American subversion of Article Nine was even more brazen, thanks to the power and popularity of General Jackson. Initially, the Madison administration conceded that the Treaty of Ghent obliged the Americans to restore to the Creeks the lands taken by Jackson in August 1814. But he argued with masterful sophistry that the Creek war was distinct from the War of 1812; therefore, the precedence of his Fort Jackson Treaty exempted that big land cession from Article Nine. Threatening to destroy any Creeks who resisted, Jackson deployed troops to defend surveyors running the lines needed to enforce the cession and accelerate

settlement of the disputed territory. Rather than confront the formidable Jackson, the Madison administration embraced his interpretation of Article Nine.⁵³

The government also could not control the white squatters, who poured onto the Creek lands ahead of the official surveys. From just 9,000 in 1810, Alabama's settler population surged to 144,000 by 1820. No American government was about to evict so many citizens from their new farms. Reporting from Tennessee, American land commissioners applauded their government's decision to embrace Indian land cessions as having "secured the affections of the Population of the south & west to the present administration & restored that confidence that formerly existed between the Rulers & the People."⁵⁴

Although under orders to evacuate his marines from Florida, the British commander at Apalachicola, Major Edward Nicolls, longed to help his black and native allies. To pressure his own government, Nicolls drafted a formal treaty with the Creeks and Seminoles, recognizing their sovereignty as nations allied with the British, who promised to enforce their land rights under Article Nine. The Red Stick leader Hillis Hadjo traveled with Nicolls to England, where they jointly sought official ratification of the treaty of alliance, but the imperial government wanted peace and trade with the United States rather than justice for their Indian allies. Rejecting the treaty, the British sought to buy off Hadjo with generous gifts before sending him back to Florida. Indeed, the imperial government ordered naval commanders not to bring any more Indians to Britain to protest their treatment by the Americans. In assurances to American diplomats, the British government disavowed the major's treaty as unauthorized and driven by an "ill-judged zeal."⁵⁵

Nicolls had also turned his fort at Apalachicola over to the maroons rather than to the Spanish authorities as he had been ordered to do. On a bluff beside the river, about fifteen miles above its mouth, the powerful fort mounted eight cannon and one howitzer, and the maroons continued to fly the Union Jack. Southern Americans denounced the "Negro Fort" as a great menace because it continued to attract fugitives from slavery. The Spanish also disliked the Negro Fort but lacked the manpower in Florida to seize it. The southern American generals welcomed that Spanish weakness as their license to attack. Without waiting for authorization from his government, Jackson instructed a subordinate, "If the fort . . . hold[s] out inducements to the Slaves of our Citizens to desert from their owner's service—this fort must be destroyed."⁵⁶

On August 27, 1816, American gunboats ascended the river and opened fire. One cannon shot penetrated the main powder magazine, which erupted in a massive explosion, destroying the fort and killing most of the defenders. The American commander, Col. Duncan Clinch, credited God for "chastising the blood-thirsty and murderous wretches that defended the fort." Some survivors escaped deeper into Florida, joining the Seminole Indians, who continued to resist American expansion.⁵⁷

Seeking to complete the job begun by Clinch, General Jackson again violated Spanish sovereignty over Florida by invading in 1818 to burn the towns of black maroons and Seminole Indians along the Suwanee River and to seize the Spanish towns of St. Marks and Pensacola. Confident in his power and popularity, Jackson again acted without waiting for authorization from his government. Luring Hillis Hadjo into a trap, Jackson's men promptly hanged him. To cap off his victory, Jackson executed a British trader, Alexander Arbuthnot, and a former Royal Marine

lieutenant, a Nicolls disciple named Robert Ambrister, for helping to arm and advise the Indian and maroon resistance. Motivated by a mix of profiteering and idealism, both men were independent operators rather than official British agents. Arbuthnot insisted that the natives had “been ill treated by the English and robbed by the Americans . . . their natural and sworn enemies.” But Jackson treated the two men as British covert agents and traitors to the white race. Although the new American president, James Monroe, and most of his cabinet officially regretted the invasion and executions, Jackson won even greater popularity in a nation that especially hated the British for aiding Indians and slaves. The federal government ultimately vindicated Jackson for his second, defiant invasion of the Floridas.⁵⁸

Fortunately for the republic, the British government did nothing but protest Jackson’s bloody foray into Spanish and Seminole territory. As in the Great Lakes country, the British refused to be drawn into another American war to defend native and maroon allies. The Spanish also recognized that they could not defend Florida, so they ceded it to the United States in February 1819. The southern Americans had won the outcome that they most wanted from the War of 1812.⁵⁹

BOUNDARIES

In twisting the Treaty of Ghent to serve American expansion, the United States leaders pursued contrasting northern and southern definitions of their national boundaries. Defeats in Canada had sobered American leaders, which set northern limits to their future expansion. Unable to conquer Canada, the Americans settled for hardening their northern border to isolate Indians within that border from British agents, traders, and soldiers outside it. By accepting that hardening, the British sacrificed the intertwined visions of a pan-Indian confederation and a native buffer zone protected by a British alliance.

While seeking a harder border to the north, the United States vigorously erased its southern border with Spain. Where northern invasions had reaped defeats, revealing British and Canadian strength, the American southern forays had won victories, exposing the British and Spanish as incapable of defending Florida and their native and maroon allies. An American Secretary of War claimed, “The incompetency of the Spanish authorities . . . would certainly justify any use of our arms for self-defense.” Americans exploited that weakness to create a lawless borderland that invited further invasions. Jackson claimed that “the immutable laws of self-defense [have] compelled the American Government to take possession of [those] parts of the Floridas in which the Spanish authority could not be maintained.” Then American diplomats exploited the turmoil to pressure the Spanish into ceding Florida, which the British tamely accepted to keep the peace with the United States.⁶⁰

But it also mattered that the Americans won a more limited victory in the north than in the south during the 1810s. In the south, Americans dispossessed the once mighty Creeks, destroyed many maroon towns that had posed a threatening alternative to the slave and plantation complex, and ultimately acquired Florida. After the Treaty of Ghent, Americans had to settle for hardening their northern border, which would not move north but would be extended westward across the continent. Despite some later saber rattling, the Americans would never again fight the British Empire. Instead the empire and republic would compromise their disputes as they did in

dividing the Oregon country in 1846. At the same time as the Americans avoided war with the British, they pressed their next great land grab by invading the republic of Mexico, which had won its independence from Spain. American victories conquered the northern quarter of Mexico, extending the United States to the Pacific. In sum, by hardening the northern border and softening the southern one, the War of 1810–1819 gave a southern tilt to the continental expansion of the United States. And that tilt would ultimately divide the Americans as they fought the Civil War over the future of the lands they had taken to the south and west.⁶¹

NOTES

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CHAPTER TWELVE

THE THEORY OF CIVILIZED SENTIMENTS

Emotion and the Creation of the United States



Nicole Eustace

When Scottish philosopher Adam Smith published a book called *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1759, at the height of the Seven Years War in North America, he crystallized a key idea that would prove essential to forging the moral justification of the British–American empire. According to Smith, the emotional elevation common to civilized nations allowed the people of those nations to lead exemplary lives of virtue, while the emotional inadequacies of “savage” nations rendered such people morally inferior. In Smith’s theory of fundamental emotional difference lay the foundations of the myth of civilization: the claim that the heightened emotional sensitivities of Europeans gave them the advanced moral standing to assert control over the lives and lands of “savages.” The British Empire emerged in the Age of Enlightenment and each development profoundly influenced the other.¹

The moment in which Adam Smith wrote marked the start of a cataclysmic era in the history of North America that would stretch for a century from 1754—the year that the Seven Years War broke out in the backwoods of Virginia—to 1854 when the Gasden Purchase Treaty was ratified, incorporating present-day New Mexico and Arizona and finalizing US control of the contiguous land area now known as the “lower 48 states.” Over the course of this century, the empires of France, Spain, and Britain would compete with each other, with Native Americans, and with the rising United States for the right to rule North America. Even as fighters skirmished for ground control, writers and speakers on all sides struggled to seize the moral high ground.

By releasing a new theory arguing that sentiment was the foundation of morality in the midst of a bold imperial struggle, Adam Smith made sure that British-Americans would turn to emotion as one means to explain and justify their military exploits. Yet he fell far short of providing anyone with an effective moral map to follow on an expedition across North America. The book was riddled with equivocations and contradictions concerning the right level of emotional engagement. The same degree of sympathy that appeared laudable in comparison to Indian “savages” might fall short in relation to French sophisticates. The emotional elevation that Smith often credited to the British nation as a whole, he other times restricted to the upper classes, arguing that some members of the British lower orders fell far short even of “savages” in their emotional capacities.

Much as imperialists might have wished to draw a bright line between the civilized and the savage, the admirable and the reprehensible, the moral demarcations of emotion proved dim at best. Given that Europeans believed that some wars were just, while others were unjust, they needed a sliding scale by which violence could sometimes be judged righteous and other times ruinous. Put to the test in British America, Smith's theories would face challenges from both above and below, from learned American commentators, from frontier commoners at the vanguard of expansion, and from Indian orators, who easily smudged the categories of sensibility vs. stoicism, civility vs. savagery.

Yet whatever the limitations of theories of moral sentiments as a guide to objective emotional truth, they would prove to have wide-ranging geo-political utility. With the eventual emergence of the United States, new emotional idioms would arise to further old imperial goals. In some sense, the very mutability of emotion was exactly what lent it philosophical strength. Ultimately, the theory of moral sentiments would provide an effective form of leverage for successive empires eager to legitimate their appropriations of land and labor. Emotion was the coin of moral capital.²

ADAM SMITH IN THE ERA OF THE SEVEN YEARS WAR

From the late sixteenth century, English colonists in the Americas had sought to differentiate their motives and methods of settlement from those of their European rivals, while also distinguishing themselves from Indians. At first, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they had confidently contrasted the beneficence of English Protestantism with both the black legends of Spanish cruelty and the wayward practices of pagan Indians. But by the time of the Seven Years War in the mid-eighteenth century, the British had become more concerned with countering French accusations that they themselves were perpetrators of barbarism and beneath the level of Indians. Although French writers asserted that Native Americans were "savages," that is people innocent of the ways of civilization, they affirmed that Indians were fully capable of learning the niceties of civility if properly taught. The English, on the other hand, they portrayed as "barbarians," a people already well-schooled in the ways of civility who had willfully fallen into vice.³

French claims of English barbarism carried extra sting because they reinforced concerns being voiced by the British themselves. Adam Smith only echoed and amplified the thoughts of many contemporaries when he posited that English emotions placed them somewhere between the Indians and the French on the spectrum of moral sentiments. According to Smith, it was "sympathy" that allowed people to live lives of "virtue and good order." He claimed that this virtuous sympathy was lacking in Indians, extinguished by the "firmness which the custom and education of his country demand of every savage." By contrast, "a humane and polished people" had "more sensibility to the passions of others." And, in Smith's telling phrase, "the French and the Italians, the two most polished nations on the continent," were far in advance of people in England. Such polish was only "just beginning to be introduced in England." In other words, Smith placed the English above the Indians, but beneath the French, in their capacities for sympathy and thus for humane civility.⁴

Crucially, mid-eighteenth-century calculations of sentiment and civility occurred in a circum-Atlantic context. Adam Smith and other British commentators not only

compared their own nation to those of continental Europe and those of the Americas, but also to the people of Africa. Here, as ever, questions of imperial interest molded analysis of emotional nature. For British commentators struggling to locate their own nation in an international moral order, it proved far easier to condemn slavery (of limited direct consequence to their small island nation) than to renounce imperial ambitions across the globe. Turning his sights from North America to Africa, Smith said, “there is not a negro from the coast of Africa . . . who does not possess a degree of magnanimity which the soul of his sordid master is too often scarce capable of conceiving.” Calling European slave masters “the refuse of the jails of Europe,” he dismissed them as “wretches who possess the virtues neither of the countries which they come from, nor those which they go to.” Smith damned European commoners as inferior to savages. If Smith’s analysis of British emotions seemed to relegate his own nation to inferior status compared to those on the European continent, he offered elite readers the comfort that his critique applied mainly to members of the British lower ranks.⁵

Smith’s phrase, “the virtues of the countries they come from” and the virtues of those “which they go to,” was telling. Despite the moral qualities he claimed for sympathy, in the final analysis, Smith rejected any binary characterizations of emotional style as inherently good or bad. Instead, he concluded that “the style of manners which takes place in any nation, may commonly upon the whole be said to be that which is most suitable to its situation.”⁶

In fact, Smith’s analysis of Indian emotion was more nuanced than it might at first seem. Although he believed that sympathy was the bedrock of morality, he also attached some value to emotional reserve. On the one hand, he opined, “savages are too much occupied by their own wants and necessities to give much attention to those of another person.” The result was that “a savage . . . whatever be the nature of his distress, expects no sympathy from those about him.” Native Americans, in this telling, lacked the essential emotional capacities that allowed Europeans to be virtuous social actors. Yet, on the other hand, he believed that Indians’ very lack of emotional sensitivity lent them a “heroic and unconquerable firmness.” Depending on the situation of a nation, different styles of emotion might be acceptable.⁷

In the end, Adam Smith argued himself into a corner in which both the “savage” and the “civilized” were constrained by contradictory moral imperatives that rendered each incapable of achieving perfect virtue. As he summed up their dilemmas, “the hardness demanded of savages diminishes their humanity; and, perhaps, the delicate sensibility required in civilized nations sometimes destroys the masculine firmness of the character.” Ultimately, he tried to square the circle by deciding that “hardness is the character most suitable to the circumstances of a savage; sensibility to those of one who lives in a very civilized society.” Yet Smith’s elegantly constructed logical proofs would shatter under the stress of imperial wars.⁸

AMERICAN ARGUMENTS FOR MANLY SENSIBILITY DURING THE SEVEN YEARS WAR

In North America, where the Seven Years War pitted British colonists against French and Indians alike, the idea that the British suffered in comparison to each was hardly likely to take hold. Instead of resigning themselves to the tradeoffs described by

Adam Smith, American colonists would grab the inherent advantages of the middle position that Smith reserved for them. Being less polished than the French meant that they could claim the kind of masculine hardiness Smith attributed to Indians, while being more sensible than savages allowed them to go to war without compromising their humanity. In the end, British colonists signed onto a new American consensus that emotion conferred civility, that civility ensured morality, and that morality entitled them to seize territory.

The Seven Years War provided an emotional proving ground as much as a military one for British Americans. As traced in the pages of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* (the leading newspaper of the colonies and one that reprinted material from London to Boston to Barbados), Anglo-American attitudes towards emotion and civilization shifted decisively in this period. In the years before the war, most leading men regarded strong passions, and especially anger in its many forms, to be a source of danger and disorder when indulged by members of the lower orders, and a potential source of dishonor for gentlemen unless expressed in the most controlled possible manner.

People of the lower ranks accused of anger in the first half of the eighteenth century were accused of lacking the fundamental ability to control their emotions. As such, they were dismissed as unworthy of any position of social control. The anger ascribed to the lowest-ranking white members of the community—runaway servants and petty thieves—always carried connotations of irrational passion. To cite some examples, a 1738 piece advertised for an “English servant . . . named John Rachford, a lusty fellow, pock broken, light gray eyes, brown curl’d hair, and stammers and swears much when in a passion”; another from 1747 asked for information on the whereabouts of “a Irish servant man, named Francis Grachams; he is a short lad, about 21 or 22 years of age, short red hair, and talks English short and quick, and passionately, as if angry.” In these advertisements, John Rachford’s and Francis Grachams’s propensity for anger was treated as an easily recognizable part of their personhood, as clear a sign of their identity or signal of their low social station as their economic occupation or the clothes they wore.⁹

Criminals were described in similar terms. One James McDonald, a shoemaker, was jailed in 1750 on suspicion of being a pickpocket. Witnesses supposedly “questioned McDonald with moderation.” Confronted, he reportedly “flew into a passion, snatched up” a pair of tongs and “assaulted” his questioner “furiously.” Reports of a convicted murderer that same year noted that one Francis Grant “made not the least offer to defend himself” but seemed resigned to “drink the bitter cup which predominancy of passion [and] rejection of reason had brought him near.” Likewise, an advertisement for a wanted man in 1759 described “Jockey Jones, a notorious thief,” as a man who “talks fast, soon angry if attacked, and of a wild look.” In all of these cases, habitual anger and criminal conduct were treated as twin attributes, one a sure mark of the other. Nor was such unbridled anger a danger only to the lowly; strong feeling was blamed for public dangers. A 1742 election riot in Philadelphia was blamed on “furious sailors” who “fell on the people,” creating “inexpressible confusion and terror.”¹⁰

Africans and African-Americans were another favorite target of such attributions of anger. Though mainland colonists preferred to avoid the subject of slave anger altogether when they could, violently angry “Negroes” (in the terminology of the

day) frequently played central parts in pieces reprinted from the Caribbean colonies. An account published in 1734 described a “number of white people destroy’d by Negroes” because they could find no “means to escape their fury.” Likewise, a 1753 letter from Jamaica decried “our intestine enemies, the rebellious Negroes,” and deplored the “rage of a cruel and intestine enemy.” Marginal members of society, from sailors without fixed residences to enslaved Africans, were indiscriminately denounced as angry, violent, and animalistic.¹¹

A key example of this trend comes in a runaway ad placed in the *Gazette* in 1742 for a man who “call[ed] himself Abraham Brick,” but whose putative owner Hannah Pugh insisted he was really “named Cambridge.” Despite trying to saddle her enslaved servant with a name that made reference to one of England’s best-known university cities, Pugh denied that the runaway should be regarded as a man capable of reason. Describing his general character, she claimed that “he is subject to fits especially when cross or vexed.” The phrase “subject to fits” was a telling one, implying as it did that Brick’s anger and vexation resulted not from his reasoned appraisal of an unjust situation, but rather from his irrational inability to control his own emotions. By Pugh’s way of thinking, Brick, having fallen slave to his own passions, deserved to be enslaved to her as well. Brick, on the other hand, seems to have concluded that running away represented a far more promising option than attempting to reason with one who claimed a right to be his “mistress.”¹²

No less prominent a man than Benjamin Franklin commented in 1747 on “the wanton and unbridled Rage, Rapine, and Lust of *Negroes*, *Molattoes*, and others, the vilest and most abandoned of Mankind,” neatly confirming the contours of this pattern. Franklin did not simply label people of African descent as rageful, he also described their rage as “unbridled,” lacking just the sort of shackles that blacks themselves were supposed to require. What’s more, he specified that their rage was “wanton”—willful, meaningless, and motiveless—far from the sort of reasoning and reasonable anger to which a self-styled gentleman might admit.¹³

Indians received similar critiques from Anglo-American colonists who accused them of unruly and unreasoning anger. Not surprisingly, the favored brand of anger attributed to Native American enemies was fury—the anger most closely associated with wildness, fierceness, and violence. Such propaganda could help vilify those Native Americans perceived as threatening and establish them as a deserving enemy. For example, an article recounting Native American cruelties “too shocking to be described” concluded that the only way to “be safe from their fury” would be to “build a sort of fort in every parish.” Descriptions of shocking fury were clearly intended to mark out Native American enemies as a people apart, a people so given to unreasoning anger they could have nothing in common with the civilized British.¹⁴

In the first half of the eighteenth century, leading Anglo-Americans simply assumed that uncontrolled angry outbursts and an inability to reason went hand in hand with lowly status. Traditional codes that asserted that extreme anger was the attribute of the animalistic, the criminal, or the insane did so in large part to undermine the effectiveness of anger-based assertions of status. Elites sought to ensure their own place in the social order by insisting on interpreting popular displays of anger as evidence of depravity, not signs of insurgence.¹⁵

But beneath the self-righteous condemnation of the shocking nature of enemy Indian anger lay a kind of grudging admiration for the military might their fury

implied. It required only the shortest of steps to shift from presenting attributions of furious anger as evidence of depravity to viewing that same trait as an indication of strength. The issue of power had long been latent in discussions of anger. But when the face of anger became united with the face of danger, the valuation of anger began to change. Indeed, by the time the Seven Years War officially began in 1754, the force of Native American anger had become a common explanation for their success in battles with the British. A 1754 letter from a Virginia soldier to a friend in Philadelphia, reprinted in the *Gazette*, remarked that, “by their furious attack and superior numbers, we expected they would storm us at once.” In battle, anger was counted as much an asset as superior manpower.¹⁶

If Indian fury was the wellspring of enemy success and strength, how long could it be before Anglo-Americans would be tempted to draw on such sources themselves? By the mid-point of the war, when things had begun to look up for the British and the *Gazette* began printing articles to encourage Anglo-American colonists to fight on to the finish, they still continued to stress anger as a formidable enemy asset. One author exhorted, “the foe staggers [but] . . . if we allow him respite, he recovers his vigour, misconstrues our delays into fears, and renews the attack with double fury; for the most dangerous wounds, unless seasonably prevented, will heal and inspire a man with fresh anger.” Anger and attack, fury and inspiration—more and more, anger was associated with desirable traits like success, strength, and power.¹⁷

By the height of the war, Anglo-Americans congratulated themselves frequently on the successes imparted by passionate anger. A 1759 *Gazette* report described a major British victory over the French and their Indian allies at Quebec, and noted that in a “very hot dispute,” the British “drove the French out of their lines . . . [with a] furious attack.” Reporting on the death of General Wolfe in the wake of that crucial victory, another writer asserted that this “last great scene should melt each Briton’s heart, and rage and grief alternately impart.” Far from being regarded as sinful or servile, rage and fury had come to be seen as an admirable, reliable source of British strength. In contrast to the French, who would ridicule the English for obtaining victory in North America at the cost of civility, British-Americans celebrated the new-found force anger added to their claims of masculine mastery.¹⁸

Out of the cultural experimentation of the Seven Years War period came a new and carefully articulated Anglo-American philosophy of emotional equipoise. While colonists throughout much of the eighteenth century had relied primarily on European writers and philosophers for instruction in emotion, by the latter half of the century colonists themselves began raising authoritative voices. In contrast to Adam Smith—who regarded savage hardness and civilized sensibility as inherently contradictory qualities, the former a hindrance to humanity, the latter a threat to masculinity—American writers began to assert that they could enjoy a middle way between these two extremes.

William Smith—an Anglican minister who served as the provost of the College of Philadelphia—summed up the emerging views of Anglo-Americans when he warned his fellow colonists at the outset of the war: “liberty never deigns to dwell but with a prudent, sensible, and manly people.” The Scottish philosopher’s fraught assumption that masculinity paired uneasily with sensibility and civilization was not for William

Smith. To the contrary, the American Smith insisted that he and his countrymen could and should resolve to have it both ways. In confronting the French in North America, Anglo-American colonists claimed to be fighting for traditional British liberties, freedoms that required the defense of anger's strength, even as they also demanded humane sensibility.¹⁹

Calling for an assault on Canada in 1758, one newspaper writer exhorted, "is there a Man whose Bosom does not glow with an honest Ardor to defend his inestimable Right as a British Subject; his Religion as a Protestant? . . . [T]o revenge . . . the unexampled Cruelties we have so long endured [from] . . . the French and their Indians?" It took strong emotion—honest ardor—to defend British rights and British religion. Meanwhile inhumane cruelty was the problem of *both* the French and their Indian allies. Far from concurring with Adam Smith's claims about the advanced "polish" of the French, British-Americans insisted both that they themselves were the best guardians of civility, and that only honorable emotions could give them the strength to prevail.²⁰

William Smith explained: "We either grovel beneath the true spirit of *freedom*; or if we aim at spirit, we are born by a sullen ferocity to the other extreme. We are yet strangers to that rational medium, which is founded on a more enlarged and refined turn of sentiment." While Adam Smith saw sensibility, a sensitivity to "delicate" emotions, as something Europeans had and savages lacked, William Smith saw the problem differently. He viewed forceful emotion, "spirit," as an invigorating source of power, which only needed to be carefully moderated in order to be highly effective. If forceful "spirit," so often evidenced as anger, could be balanced with a "refined turn of sentiment," in the form of cultivated compassion, then the values of masculinity and humanity might at last be joined. Somewhere between effeminacy and inhumanity lay the colonial ideal of civility.²¹

Ultimately, the British won a clear and sweeping victory in Canada, denying the French any further claim to the vast northern region of North America. Colonists celebrated their conquest with expressions of righteous anger. Their resulting confidence in their ability to mete that anger in such a way as to protect liberty while still preserving civility can be clearly traced through changes in their use of the word "wrath".

Wrath was perhaps the strongest possible form of anger—certainly greater than resentment, irritation, warmth, or heat, and even superseding fury and rage. In fact, the word "wrath" was not applied to British-Americans in any context in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* until 1763. Before then, only God could be wrathful with impunity, as when a Caribbean writer said his people "justly feel the wrath of God," or when a synod of Philadelphia ministers warned the townspeople to beware "the deserved wrath of heaven." Anyone but God who was described as wrathful was simultaneously derided with epithets like "anti-Christian." But by the close of the war, with France in defeat and the jubilant British-Americans victorious, they began to feel that they, too, might express anger as unalloyed as actual wrath. As one New Yorker writing from Detroit put it in 1763, we shall take "such revenge on the butcheries committed by the barbarians as shall be a LASTING MONUMENT to the wrath of INJURED BRITONS and be sufficient to deter the beasts from ever attempting the like hereafter." The French and the Indians were butchers, barbarians, and beasts. Anglo-Americans, on the other hand, trumpeted the way their wrath

had lent them force. Victory confirmed power and power conferred the right to express anger. And, of course, the expression of anger itself created a further claim to power.²²

STATUS AND SENTIMENT IN PONTIAC'S WAR, 1763–1767

The great imperial conflict between England and France ended with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763. But control of the continent would remain in doubt for centuries to come. European mapmakers might draw elegant lines in ink on parchment claiming or conceding vast swathes of land, but actual habitation by particular groups of people remained fluid and contested. European empires contended not only with one another, but also with multiple Indian empires throughout the colonial period and into the US national period. As many Native American groups fought for the English as did for the French during the Seven Years War. Those who had allied with the British expected that at war's end their contributions would be recognized with rewards and shows of respect. Those who had fought with the French were not included as signatories at the Treaty of Paris; not surprisingly, they concluded that they were thus not bound by it. Yet in the event, the British-American embrace of the myth of their own civilized superiority prevented them from paying regard to any Indians, no matter whether they were former allies or adversaries. British-Americans credited themselves alone with having attained the "refined turn of sentiment" necessary to secure liberty and ensure the right to rule.²³

The British used the language of emotion to try define every encounter between themselves and their Indian rivals for the continent. As much as battles and bloodshed mattered in establishing control, so too did ideas and ink. No sooner had the British congratulated themselves on expelling the French from North America in 1763, than they faced a new and determined set of enemies under the loosely coordinated leadership of Pontiac, the Ottawa chief who swept down from the Great Lakes to challenge the British for control of all of the Ohio River valley, from Michigan to Pennsylvania.²⁴

As British-Americans debated among themselves how to respond to the allied groups of Delaware, Shawnee, and Ottawa troops that confronted them, the class-differences in emotional culture identified by Adam Smith in the context of the slave trade played out in dramatic fashion. Frontier commoners with a direct personal stake in immediate and continuing British expansionism urged their fellow commoners to stoke the embers of their anger and carry war into the backcountry. They diverged markedly in aims and attitudes from ruling urban elites, who believed it possible to take a more temperate course. Back in Britain, the king's magistrates announced the Proclamation Line of 1763, an edict that forbid colonial settlement west of the Appalachian mountains, effectively setting a boundary fence on colonial settlement. Closer to home, colonial legislators and governors warned their backcountry compatriots to cultivate their powers of sympathy and guard against the dangers of indiscrete heat.²⁵

Critiques of the extremes of frontiersmen's anger constituted the most crucial element of elite efforts to discredit their emotions and discount their concerns. Charles

Read, a New Jersey justice with Philadelphia connections, summed up neatly the attitude of the upper class when he claimed that, “weak minds are apt to be in extraordinary measure inflamed and get into violent Ferments on reading an Article in the *Gazette* of a few Persons being destroyed by *Indians*, yet these very Persons with little or no Emotion, run over an Article of a Battle between two Armies, where thousands fell on a Side.” Unpredictable, irrational, and immoderate anger was the mark of weak-minded commoners.²⁶

The contest for moral elevation occurred as much within Anglo-American society as across cultures. According to elite rhetoric, it was the responsibility of those of a “refined turn of sentiment” (i.e., those able to distinguish between different varieties of anger and make nice distinctions in its expression) to attempt to rein in the rage and fury of those one writer dismissed as “angry, giddy, violent, and revengeful People.” As another particularly confident and condescending member of the self-styled elite explained matters:

The Lower Sort of People are very imitative of their Superiors.—They watch their Motions, looks and Eyes:—If therefore the more sensible Part of you would openly avow your Disapprobation of these Measures, you will find this Rage and Clamour will soon subside. These People will disperse; they will crumble like the Dust, and disappear (at least in a hostile Manner) like the Snow that melted yesterday.

Transparently self-serving as such wishful thinking was, elites did not hesitate to reassure themselves that new calls for war arose not from any legitimate concerns on the part of backcountry folk facing intensified Indian threats after years of frontier warfare, but rather from the uncontrolled anger of “lower sorts” in need of a firm hand and clear instruction in matters of anger management. This writer’s easy equation of superiority and sensibility highlights how important emotion had become as a mark of elite status.²⁷

Yet commoners who feared for the fates of their families as well as their farms refused to be put off by the blandishments of Eastern leaders. In Pennsylvania, the dispute rose to the point that settlers in the town of Paxton took vigilante action against the nearest Indians at hand (peaceful Christian converts living at Connestoga) and refused to apologize for the action. To the contrary, they marched on the city of Philadelphia demanding greater political representation and insisting that “neglect . . . by the Public is sufficient to make us mad with rage and tempt us to do what nothing but the most violent necessity can vindicate.” If extreme anger could connote uncouth incivility, it could also convey masculine strength and power.²⁸

In place of the notion that restrained resentment was the only acceptable brand of anger, backcountry spokesmen embraced the idea that extreme varieties of anger had laudable elements. They warned one and all that they remained determined to wreak vengeance upon any Indian suspected of settler attacks, none of whom should hope “to elude the Fury of the brave Relatives of the Murdered.” They recast rage and fury as elements of bravery, not of depravity. Meanwhile, they claimed that elite restraint grew not from civilized sensibility so much as from effeminate ineffectiveness. They charged, “Indians . . . look with Contempt upon us as a pusillanimous Pack of *old Women*, divided among ourselves without SPIRIT or

RESOLUTION to call them to Account.” Frequently derided for their so-called savage ferocity, the Paxton rebels countered those accusations by critiquing their elite antagonists as spiritless and emasculated men incapable of exercising invigorating anger.²⁹

Ultimately, combined British and British-American forces succeeded in enough battles to force many of the warriors allied with Pontiac to come to terms. Though several different treaties were negotiated piecemeal, perhaps the most celebrated was that of a Pennsylvania-based officer by the name of Henry Bouquet. Bouquet sent back to the colony an elaborate journal in which he took great care to record the emotional performance by which he asserted the terms of British-American control over their Indian enemies. Bouquet’s “Journal and Conferences with the Western Indians,” addressed to the governor and his council and incorporated into the colony’s official minutes, reported protracted talks with members of the Seneca, Delaware, and Shawnee nations from September 20 to November 14, 1764. His journal indicates that he paid the utmost attention to the niceties of emotional expression, while also inadvertently revealing Indian skepticism about British-Americans’ exclusionary claims to civilized sensibility.³⁰

Colonel Bouquet, by his own account, arrived in the Ohio Valley determined to conquer any Indians who dared to offer resistance. In his first public speech, on September 20, 1764, he took the hard line that he would “shew no mercy for the future to any of your Nations that shall fall into my hands.” Curiously, however, he backtracked almost immediately from the severity of this stance. Later in the same speech he clarified that “though I have had it in my power to put you all to death . . . you have yet a door open to mercy.” His quick revision is revealing, for according to Bouquet’s understanding of elite forms, his communications with the Indians needed to convey both civility and strength. Proffering mercy while yet threatening to withdraw it offered one way to walk this line.³¹

Still, masterful as Bouquet intended this message to sound, it fell rather flat with his Indian audience. For the irony of the fact that this high-ranking representative of the “civilized” world had arrived in Indian country and declared that he would not show mercy was not lost on the Native Americans sent to treat with him. Perhaps aware that British-Americans were in the habit of defining savagery explicitly as a lack of mercy—as when a British general referred to “Savages, who shew no Mercy in their Depredations,” or when then-Governor Hamilton deplored the “Savage cruelty of a merciless Enemy”—the assembled Indians wryly reminded Bouquet of his own investment in civility. Their first response to his proclamation, offered by “an Onondago and an Oneida Indian” on October 2, warned that, “we still see you keep some evil designs in your minds.” According to Bouquet’s journal, they added that they hoped that the English would “remove all this from their hearts and . . . receive them civilly . . . and they will treat you in the same manner.” To underscore their point, the assembled Indians declined further substantive talks on prisoner exchange for another two weeks.³²

Much as Bouquet wished to project manly strength, he had nothing to gain from relinquishing British-American claims to civility. So rather than continue alternately offering and withdrawing mercy, Bouquet shifted to fortifying mercy with anger, attempting thereby to create the perfect amalgam of sensibility and masculinity. At an October 20 meeting, he began by declaring to the Seneca, Delaware, and Shawnee

representatives, “you must be sensible that you deserve the severest Chastisement, but the English are a merciful and generous people, averse to shed the blood of even their most cruel Enemies.” Then, having laid claim to civility for himself and his people, Bouquet turned his attention to the question of anger. Here he threw in a twist certain to play well with frontier audiences. He told the Indians that the month-long delay in negotiations over prisoner returns had to end because he had come accompanied by “the relations of those people you have massacred or taken prisoners and it is with the greatest difficulty that I can protect you against their just resentment.”³³

Everything about Bouquet’s self-described behavior was calculated to convey pan-British unity and to uphold British-American dignity at the expense of Native Americans’. Whether invoking resentment or mercy, he consistently sought to modulate his own emotional expression to convey the best possible mix of gentility, civility, and masculinity. Despite the elite’s strident early stance against “ruffian” rage and their lofty assertions that human nature was all “formed out of the same essence,” Pennsylvania’s leaders eventually capitulated to the demands for war of backcountry commoners.

Indeed, elites did more than simply respond to the worst demands of commoners. They deliberately listened selectively, harkening only to the most stridently anti-Indian elements of frontier fury. In fact, many frontier folk were more discriminating in their judgments of Indians than elite criticism of their “undistinguishing resentment” would lead one to believe. For example, “The Apology of the Paxton Volunteers” included the statement that “the Five Nations have ever retained some Reputation for Honour and Fidelity.” The remark received no general recognition whatsoever. Not only did elites prefer to portray commoners as muddle-headed rubes, they actually depended upon them to play this part. For leaders benefited twofold from the anti-Indian element in the rhetoric of the lower orders: it provided an important political distraction while allowing elites to claim for themselves a unique moral elevation. Ongoing expression of elite outrage at the depravity of the lower orders served to obscure their own contributions to anti-Indian policies as well as their disproportionate access to state power.³⁴

THOMAS PAINE AND UNIVERSAL PASSIONS IN THE ERA OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The treaties of the 1767 era did little to assure the interests of either the British or of Indians, but they did much to further the relentless advance of American frontier settlement. The war with Pontiac and his allies seemed to many colonists to highlight the problems with the Proclamation Line of 1763 and this—combined with many further efforts to impose British political, economic, and military control in the colonies—ultimately led to the movement for Revolution. Just as Pontiac’s fighters had been motivated in no small part by the desire to revenge the disrespect shown them by British officers, so Americans on the eve of revolution increasingly came to believe that their hard-forged brand of emotional equipoise fundamentally differentiated them from the British.

In October of 1775, with independence still a year distant, but military confrontations already under way, General George Washington sought to explain the American

position to the world at large. To justify the American right to rebellion, he declared that, far from suffering “poverty of soul, and baseness of spirit,” the “freeborn sons of America . . . animated by the genuine principles of liberty and love of their country” were well “capable of distinguishing between the blessings of liberty and the wretchedness of slavery.” Washington’s conviction that moral emotions—virtuous spirits—motivated love of country, devotion to freedom, and despisement of slavery grew out of eighteenth-century versions of classical theories. His assertions followed the Aristotelian theory that *thumos*—or spirit—distinguished those with natural claims to liberty from those who were inherently slavish.³⁵

We are now so accustomed to speaking of the “spirit of freedom,” and perhaps even more commonly of the “spirit of ’76,” that we have forgotten to query the curious connection such phrases assert between exalted feelings and legal freedom. Yet, from at least the time of Aristotle, slaveholders had adhered to the idea that enslaved people did not feel the same kinds of emotions as free people. Indeed, Aristotle, in his work *Politics*, made the explicit claim that “natural slaves,” that is to say people inherently slavish by nature, could be recognized by their singular lack of spirit or *thumos*. He explained *thumos* as that “quality of soul which begets friendship and enables us to love,” adding that, “the power of command and the love of freedom are in all men based upon this quality.” According to Aristotle, then, slave-status was less a legal category than a state of being. Those who lacked *thumos*, the emotional capacity to love freedom, could naturally be accounted slaves, while those possessed of the proper spirit, the ability to love their fellows and value their liberty, deserved the reward of self-command. An examination of the language of rebellion reveals that eighteenth-century Anglo-Americans regarded emotional capacities as the linchpin of liberty.³⁶

The significance that revolutionaries attached to links between *thumos* and liberty, feeling and freedom, has long been overlooked. Many whites preferred to regard slavery not as any kind of man-made institution, but rather as the inborn condition of those whose innate lack of emotional spirit made them inherently slavish. For revolutionaries, to display “spirit” was both to claim and explain one’s right to freedom. For historians, then, the study of competing assumptions about the prevalence of emotion—from insistence on its deep cross-group variance to belief in its universal natural occurrence—provides the key to understanding evolving social attitudes in the revolutionary era.³⁷

In the earliest days of colonial protests, when new British fiscal policies in the wake of the financially draining Seven Years War had just begun to provoke opposition, many Anglo-Americans assumed that emotions, like manners, served well as status markers, parting the rude from the refined. Colonial protestors seeking allies among the English elite thus worked to establish their own emotional credentials as skilled performers of genteel feeling. Drawing on the transatlantic culture of sensibility, they tried to renegotiate yet reaffirm alliances with their British “brethren.” Claiming that they could not sustain the financial burdens imposed by new British taxation policies, they declared, that the threat of “general penury . . . and impending ruin . . . must doubtless affect every tender breast.” Determined to demonstrate their opposition to the act, they warned each other, “deaf must we be to the voice . . . of reason and virtue, and totally callous to every softer emotion, if, without sufficient cause, we refuse to join our fellow citizens in so indispensable

a work.” Stressing above all the well-modulated nature of their soft emotions, protest leaders emphasized that their carefully considered sentiments bore no relation to the alternately inadequate or excessive passions of the lower sort (be they enslaved blacks or white workers).³⁸

But when the British responded to American emotional overtures with nothing but scorn, colonists began brandishing the stronger passions of the people. Though local American elites had no desire to cede social or political control to the masses, they found that they could not succeed in the cause of revolution without the aid of just the sort of immoderate emotion they had so recently eschewed in their communications with Britain. They thus began seeking ways to combine the civility and respectability attributed to refined feelings with the force and might believed to stem from popular passions.³⁹

Patriot leaders found their solution in the notion of *spirit*, a vehement brand of emotion that burnished the power of passion with the luster of classical virtue. As a 1765 statement in the *Gazette*, originating in Rhode Island, explained matters, “the Inhabitants of the . . . colonies, affected with their present Distresses, and animated with the noble Spirit of Liberty have proposed . . . [to] assert our Rights with a becoming Firmness.” Where once moderate claims of being “sensibly affected” were all that resisters cared to make in their public statements, they now turned to invocations of “noble spirit” in order to better display “becoming firmness,” flaunting virtuous vigor alongside civilized refinement.⁴⁰

As protest efforts gathered steam, from early petitions against the Stamp Act through to the Declaration of Independence, revolutionaries shifted their tactics, away from simple attempts to affirm membership in a British-dominated cult of sensibility and towards complex assertions of the superior worth of American emotions. In the wake of the war with Pontiac-allied Indians, Anglo-American commentators like William Smith complimented Native Americans on “their strong and ferocious eloquence” and their “inflexible spirit of independence,” paving the way for the kind of rhetorical resolve that would power the Patriot movement over the next decade. Unlike enslaved Africans, so often denigrated as spiritless, Native Americans were alternately castigated and celebrated for their supposedly extreme degree of spirit. Euro-American colonists sought to appropriate laudable elements of Indian spirit even as they also made claim to the best of European sensibility.⁴¹

The quest to forge an independence movement, to nurture incipient nationalism and a common identity on which it could rest, required a new set of social precepts and social connections that forced changes in society. No one did more to publicize and popularize new ideas about emotion and freedom than Thomas Paine. In January 1776, he issued a clarion call to “examine the passions and feelings of mankind,” confident that emotional scrutiny would lead to the acknowledgement of natural rights and, consequently, to support for American independence. In the introductory pages of the pamphlet he titled *Common Sense*, he declared:

The Cause of America is in a great Measure the Cause of all Mankind . . . The laying a Country desolate with Fire and Sword, declaring War against the natural Rights of all Mankind, and extirpating the defenders thereof from the Face of the Earth, is the Concern of every Man to whom Nature has given the Power of feeling of which Class, regardless of Party Censure, is the AUTHOR.

With these words, Paine claimed once more the “power of feeling” for the patriot movement and made emotion, a gift of nature, the common trait of all mankind. In so doing, he furthered the concept of innate equality basic to the theory of natural rights.⁴²

In one fell swoop, he defied the use of sentiment for any sort of social division. The only social class Paine cared to acknowledge was the universal one defined by the common feelings of all humanity. No more would the “better sort” be able to claim exclusive control over the power of feeling; it was not the special defining attribute of the few, but rather a gift of nature open to all. His evident belief that all mankind shared in common the same set of passions and feelings foreshadowed the position soon to become famous as the rallying point of a revolution, that all men were created equal. Indeed, in addressing himself to *all* mankind, Paine announced a progressive agenda that surpassed that of even the most ardent proponents of patriotic “spirit.”

Uncompromising emotional universalism lay at the heart of Paine’s politics. He insisted that in emotion lay the essence of shared humanity. Critiquing the very notion of hierarchy, and with it all inflexible social divisions, he declared that “mankind being originally equals in the order of creation . . . how a race of men came into the world so exalted above the rest, and distinguished like some new species is worth enquiring into.” For Paine, invoking the biological absurdity of assigning human beings to different species exposed the corresponding farcicality of social divisions. He insisted that emotion was the distinctive characteristic of humanity as a whole, explaining: “the Almighty hath implanted in us these unextinguishable feelings for good and wise purposes . . . they distinguish us from the herd of common animals.” In asking his readers to be emotionally moved, Paine thus invited them to fully embrace the radical egalitarianism with which he hoped to imbue the revolutionary movement.⁴³

Paine believed it to be a simple matter of common sense to regard “the passions and feelings of mankind” as “the touchstone of nature,” the best basis on which to form judgments on any matter, even the vexed choice between reconciliation and revolutionary rebellion that faced Americans in 1776. When Paine claimed that “the passions and feelings of mankind” were granted by nature equally to all and were intended to provide a moral touchstone accessible to all, he argued implicitly for the natural right to political participation. Since moral standing could be better measured by emotional sensitivity than by social status, all with “the power of feeling” should have an equal share in the organization of governance.⁴⁴

Paine broke radically with the traditional Anglo-American assumption that emotion made a reliable mark of moral and social distinction. Prior to the patriot era, on the rare occasions when Anglo-Americans considered African-American emotion at all, they usually assumed that slave spirits were as low as their rank. With emotional control linked so closely to social control, shows of emotion on the part of the enslaved had the potential to shake the colonial slave system to its very foundations. For example, one *Gazette* report of a “horrid Negroe plot” to commit mass murder in Antigua claimed that the slaves in revolt had “Hearts and Minds capable of conceiving, Heads fit for contriving, and Hands and Courage for executing the deepest and most bloody Crime.” No failures of *thumos* or *logos* in those hearts and heads. Recounting efforts to round up and execute every slave participant,

the article emphasized “that . . . a . . . Stop might have been put to their prosecuting this Bloody Conspiracy; but the Conspirators Spirits seem’d rather to be raised than sunk.” Suddenly, the shared etymological root of the word “spirit” and the word “conspire” takes on tactical significance. Enslaved people who began by bolstering each other’s spirits might well end by cooperating in armed insurrections.⁴⁵

By the last quarter of the century, both black and white antislavery activists began to invoke the emotional suffering of the enslaved as a means of countering traditional claims that Africans’ “natural” emotional insensitivity fitted them for enslavement. It was no accident that activists chose emotional identification as a key means of illuminating the plight of the enslaved. Rather, this was a strategic move made in direct opposition to the traditional practices of slavery’s supporters. Yet at the time of the Revolution, patriots like Paine were at the very leading edge of these progressive arguments. Many less forward-thinking revolutionaries drew on ideas about feeling and freedom not to make arguments for universal liberation, but rather to claim special status for white men.⁴⁶

Selling 120,000–150,000 copies, or one for every five adults in colonial British America, Paine’s pamphlet spoke to patriots across the continent who were already primed by decades of imperial warfare, as well as mounting debates about slavery, to anticipate links between feeling and freedom. Revolutionaries’ search for the common foundations of humanity in shared emotionality led them to collapse some social divisions. Dawning belief in emotional parity among patriots provided important underpinning for emerging ideas about natural equality. Yet even as emotion provided a new basis for cross-class unity among American whites, it continued to contribute to racialized theories of natural difference between free whites, Indians, and enslaved blacks.⁴⁷

The spirit of liberty arose from the careful combination of genteel feeling and popular passion. Consisting of a heady blend of brotherly love, mighty anger, and communal sympathy, and public grief, it was to mediate between the debased insensibility imputed to the enslaved and the excessive spirit ascribed to Indians, while also avoiding the ineffectual effeminacy attributed to English civility. According to eighteenth-century understandings, love was unknown among “natural slaves;” mercy and sympathy were absent in “savages;” and anger was admirable only in men. So while an emphasis on spirit opened a rhetorical door to equality for free white men, it effectively closed it to Africans, Indians, and women. This hypocrisy on the key issue of liberty meant that the new nation would suffer from instability at its very foundation. When the young nation again confronted Great Britain in a renewed fight for freedom in 1812, these fractures would threaten to shatter the new United States.⁴⁸

LOVE, LIBERTY, AND PATRIOTISM IN THE WAR OF 1812

For many Britons, the idealistic rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence—“We hold these Truths to be Self-evident: that all Men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness”—could not have been more jarring. American hypocrites trumpeted a new universal philosophy of natural rights, scorning the traditional rights of Englishman rooted in the Magna Carta, even as they continued

to practice racial slavery, which became outlawed within Great Britain (though not its Caribbean colonies) over the same period. British commentators, such as Samuel Johnson, demanded to know, “how is it we hear the loudest yelps for liberty from the drivers of Negroes?”⁴⁹

Throughout the first quarter-century of US independence, Britons and Americans continued to chafe each other about which nation had the best right to claim to be the world’s leading protector of liberty. Even as white Americans claimed to need enslaved Africans and African-Americans to people their labor force, they coveted Indian lands to support the ever-growing number of the nation’s people. The British interfered with US plans on both counts. On the continent, the British continued to man and supply Indian trading posts throughout the West, supporting the rival population from whom the US perceived the greatest immediate threat. On the ocean, Britain controlled Atlantic shipping, forbidding the African slave trade after 1807 and harassing US merchant vessels. Meanwhile, at sea, Britain’s traditional commitment to liberty seemed to be reversed. The British Royal Navy needed every hand it could find on deck; its officers did not hesitate to board American ships to round up vagabond British seamen, no matter that they also swept the occasional American into British nets.⁵⁰

In the midst of such moral and political confusion, both Americans and Britons made scattershot efforts to maintain the better claim to virtue. Though the United States boasted of being the land of the free, it drew sharp distinctions between the citizenship rights of native-born, property-holding white men and the options available to all those national denizens not recognized as formal citizens. The British lambasted Americans for the way their practices constricted liberty—even though their own impressment tactics flouted the rights of American citizenry and their dominion of the seas supported their own imperial efforts in India and beyond. The rising crisis with Britain ultimately resulted in the outbreak of a new war, one that American proponents of the conflict liked to call the “Second War of Independence,” but that historians today call the War of 1812.⁵¹

Ostensibly a conflict with Britain over naval rights, the American War of 1812 quickly became a test of the strength and meaning of American patriotism in a nation torn by political factionalism and by significant legal and civic distinctions among the many members of its varied population. As the US and Britain squared off, each enjoyed lobbing charges of incivility against the other. Since many Americans, even after the Revolution, remained in thrall to the idea that Britain epitomized civilized ideals, they took special care to try to defend their claim to be liberty’s champions, even as they also remained effective guardians of the special privileges of white men.

As already discussed, thinkers going back to Aristotle have posited that love of liberty provides the basis for patriotism, that brotherly bonds form the foundation of virtuous citizenship. Yet “love of liberty” is not at all a timeless or unchanging concept. Americans of the early republic drew on love in support of war in culturally specific and politically revealing ways. The “brotherly love” that proved so fundamental to the definition of revolutionary spirit gave way, by the era of 1812, to a new emphasis on romantic love, on heterosexual affection. Looking closely at popular culture in this period shows clearly how much public attention focused on the role of romantic courtship and passionate love in pro-war arguments.

Throughout the war years, British opponents worked to portray the war as a romantic adventure, one in which dashing young American men went to war to win the hearts of patriotic maidens, and in which the thrill of romantic love contributed directly to the surge of patriotism. Portraits of gallant husbands and dedicated fathers severed from their families and compelled to miserable toil in the floating dungeons of an enemy nation proved highly effective in American efforts to dramatize the issue of British impressment. From generic songs and poems to specific descriptions of particular military engagements, war supporters relied on a new language of romantic patriotism to tell the story of the war. From the desks of high military officers and prominent politicians, the presses of the nation's burgeoning newspaper and pamphlet printers, and the kitchen tables of ordinary scribblers came a flood of professional and amateur efforts.

One popular song called "The Love of Country" spells out precisely how people of the day believed the transubstantiation of conjugal and national love was supposed to occur:

A soldier is a gentleman,
His honor is his life,
And he that won't stand to his post,
Will ne'er stand by his wife.

Since love and honor are the same,
Or are so near allied,
That neither can exist alone,
But flourish side by side

Then farewell sweet-hearts for a while,
Ye pretty girls adieu!
And when we've drove the British dogs,
We'll kiss it out with you.

Here men were warned to beware the error of shirking from combat lest they be suspected of connubial inconstancy as well. At the same time, with the promise that "love and honor are the same," men and women alike were told that soldiers made the best husbands and lovers. The relationship between martial and marital ardor was cyclical; the same men roused to go to war would return again to "kiss it out" with pretty girls and sweethearts.⁵²

Officials at the highest level of government traded on these same themes of American family love. In the opening days of the war, President James Madison's chargé d'affaires in Britain, Jonathan Russell, claimed loudly that British impressment compared poorly with American slavery. Russell began by declaring that pressing a sailor into royal service was much like forcing him into perpetual hereditary bondage. Meeting in London with the British foreign minister Lord Castlereagh in the summer of 1812, Russell explained that, "in the United States, this practice of impressment was seen as bearing a strong resemblance to the slave trade." In fact, he went on, compared to enslavement in America, impressment aboard a British ship was actually "aggravated indeed in some of its features." How could Russell claim

that impressing sailors was even worse in some respects than enslaving men, women, and children?⁵³

Impressed US sailors suffered more than enslaved Africans did, Russell explained, because once Africans had been torn from their homeland they had no chance of ever meeting kith or kin again, whereas American sailors forced into British service might very well be put into the position of having to fight against members of their own families. As Russell put the point to Castlereagh, an enslaved African could enjoy “the consciousness that, if he could no longer associate with those who were dear to him, he was not compelled to do them injury.” By contrast, an impressed American sailor ran the risk of being “forced, at times, to hazard his life in despoiling or destroying his kindred and countrymen.” In this preposterous argument, the social death of Atlantic enslavement compared favorably with a stint of royal naval service.⁵⁴

The extent of family devastation served as the key index of suffering. Even though an enslaved person would never see home or homeland again, he or she did not have to fight and kill those once held close. By this convoluted reasoning, American slavery offered something like liberty, and US slaveholders could hold their heads high when calling for confrontation with British tyranny.

Many listeners in the US lapped up what Russell dished out. Russell offered the synopsis of his conversation with Castlereagh in a formal report prepared for Secretary of State James Monroe. Monroe and Madison made immediate use of his remarks, ordering them to be published by official congressional printer Roger Chew Weightman as *A Message from the President of the United States, Transmitting Copies of a Communication from Mr. Russell to the Secretary of State*. The date-line on Russell’s letter read London, September 17, 1812. Madison forwarded it to congress on November 18, 1812—almost two months to the day after it was sent—something like warp speed in an age when Atlantic crossings took weeks. No sooner did Russell’s repartee with Castlereagh appear in print in the capital than it was reprinted in newspapers across the northeast for the benefit of the general reading public.⁵⁵

Americans and Britons were warring over which nation could lay the greatest claim to loving liberty. Each side sought as its prize the moral right to imperial expansion—Britain in India, the US in North America. Despite the fight for freedom that had once framed the American independence movement, the United States’ continuing and deepening investment in slavery, as well as its territorial designs on Native American lands, had compromised newer American pronouncements in favor of liberty. When politicians and popular polemicists used the issue of lost love to emphasize the tyrannical side of the British royal navy, they did much to tip the scales of virtue back towards the United States.⁵⁶

In American popular culture, in the era of the War of 1812, war stories and love stories intertwined. Many claims of equivalence were open and unrepentant. One of the first novels to come out of the war was an 1816 production by a New York writer named Samuel Woodworth with the unwieldy but suggestive title: *The Champions of Freedom, or The Mysterious Chief, A Romance of the Nineteenth Century, Founded in the Events of the War between the United States and Great Britain, Which Terminated in March 1815*. The book interwove seduction plots worthy of a sentimental romance novel with detailed historical descriptions of all the major events of the war. As a chapter titled “Love and Patriotism” made clear,

the novel juxtaposed these seemingly unrelated storylines the better to showcase the essential relationship between romantic love and martial action. The chapter began with an epigram: “Love rais’d his noble thoughts to brave achievements / For love’s the steel that strikes upon the flint . . . / And spreads the sparkles round to warm the world.” Here love and bravery both appeared as inflammatory states, libidinal heat the spur of military honor. Americans of the early republic largely enjoyed the notion of romantic love as national duty.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, Woodworth’s complex title, “The Champions of Freedom” or “The Mysterious Chief,” elided the difference between the US’s stated war opponent—Britain—and the war’s ghostly proxy losers, the “mysterious” Indians whose lands were overrun by the “champions of freedom.” As war supporters well knew, the connections between war and romance were literal as well as figurative. Every time war boosters joined the prosecution of the war to the private love of courting couples, they made the take-over of Indian lands into a romantic possibility and a patriotic duty. Though the US won no changes in British policy as a result of the war, the country did gain undisputed control of substantial Western territories once claimed by Indians, lands that would soon be settled by whites and cultivated in substantial part by enslaved men and women. In an age when starting a family usually meant clearing a farm, the population’s fertility and the land’s fecundity—private romance and public patriotism—were closely linked.

The nation never did wholly disavow the desire for aggregate increases in land and people that had driven the war from the start. From the moment the War of 1812 ended, the US added a new state to the union each year for six years straight, a process halted temporarily only by the crisis over slave representation that resulted in the Missouri compromise. In 1816, Indiana joined the US, followed by Mississippi in 1817, Illinois in 1818, Alabama in 1819, Maine in 1820, and Missouri in 1821. Each of these border-states had been under at least the partial control of Indians before the War of 1812; the US ability to legally annex these new states resulted directly from its victory. Before the Civil War began, vast new territories would be won in the Mexican War and the nation’s land claims would reach the Pacific. Once the Civil War ended, the legal process of formally incorporating these lands as official states would continue unabated. The echoes of patriotic love and civilized sentiment have long reverberated through American history, shaping the stories we tell about the origins of the nation.

NOTES

- 1 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London: Printed for A. Millar, in the Strand; and A. Kincaid and J. Bell, in Edinburgh, 1759).
- 2 The concept of “moral capital” was made influential by Christopher Leslie Brown. See Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2006).
- 3 On the early English development of the “black legend” of Spanish cruelty, see Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Providence Island, 1630–1641: The Other Puritan Colony* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 93. On Anglo-French debates about civility, savagery, and barbarism see David A. Bell, “English Barbarians and French Martyrs,” in Bell, *The Cult of Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 78–106.

- See also Gordon M. Sayre, *Les Sauvages Américains: Representations of Native Americans in French and English Colonial Literature* (Chapel Hill, 1997), 251. On enduring connections between sentiment and civility, see Andrew R.L. Cayton, “‘Noble Actors’ upon ‘the Theater of Honor’: Power and Civility in the Treaty of Grenville,” in Cayton and Fredrika J. Teute, eds., *Contact Points: American Frontiers from the Mohawk Valley to the Mississippi, 1750–1830* (Chapel Hill, 1998), 240, 245.
- 4 Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 403–404.
 - 5 Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 402; and Brown, *Moral Capital*, 158–159. On the notion of the circum-Atlantic, see David Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History,” in David Armitage and Michael J. Braddock, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).
 - 6 Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 409.
 - 7 Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 398–399, 403.
 - 8 Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 408–409.
 - 9 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Oct. 26, 1738 and Aug. 13, 1747. Such views of the passions as dangerous and anti-rational were by no means confined to the realm of informal “common knowledge” in this period, but actually figured importantly in the learned theories of moral philosophers. See Jeffrey Barnouw, “Passion as ‘Confused’ Perception or Thought in Descartes, Malebranche, and Hutcheson,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (June 1992): 397–424, 401.
 - 10 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 17, 1750; Nov. 29, 1753; May 3, 1759; and July 8, 1742.
 - 11 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, February 13, 1734; October 7, 1742; and January 16, 1753.
 - 12 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 8, 1742.
 - 13 [Benjamin Franklin], *Plain Truth: Or Serious Considerations on the Present State of the City of Philadelphia and Province of Pennsylvania*, 2d ed. ([Philadelphia: Franklin], 1747), 13–14.
 - 14 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Dec. 13, 1753, June 6, 1751, and Oct. 31, 1754.
 - 15 This attitude on the part of elites also had long roots stretching back at least to the middle ages. See Paul Freedman, “Peasant Anger in the Late Middle Ages,” in Barbara H. Rosenwein, ed., *Anger’s Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1998), 171, 173.
 - 16 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 31, 1754.
 - 17 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 17, 1759.
 - 18 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Oct. 12, 1758; Oct. 25, 1759; and Nov. 8, 1759. On Anglo-French debates about civility, savagery, and barbarism (with particular emphasis on the Pennsylvania context), see Bell, “English Barbarians and French Martyrs,” See also Sayre, *Les Sauvages Américains* 251.
 - 19 William Smith, “Preface,” in Thomas Barton, *Unanimity and Public Spirit* (Philadelphia: Franklin and Hall, 1755), xi (hereafter cited as Smith in Barton, *Unanimity and Public Spirit*).
 - 20 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, April 6, 1758.
 - 21 Smith in Barton, *Unanimity and Public Spirit*, xiii.
 - 22 *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 7, 1752; June 2, 1757; Nov. 16, 1758 and Aug. 11, 1763.
 - 23 See Paul Mapp, *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713–1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).
 - 24 See Gregory Evans Dowd, *War under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations, and the British Empire* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002).
 - 25 See Collin G. Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
 - 26 Charles Read to John Ladd, Jan. 7, 1764, published as: Charles Read, *Copy of a Letter from Charles Read, Esq; to the Hon: John Ladd, Esq; and His Associates, Justices of the*

Peace for the County of Gloucester (Philadelphia: Andrew Steuart, 1764). The Read letter went through three Steuart editions in 1764.

- 27 *A Dialogue Containing Some Reflections on the Late Declaration and Remonstrance of the Back-Inhabitants of the Province of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: [Andrew Steuart], 1764), 7 (hereafter cited as *Reflections on the Late Declaration and Remonstrance*) and *A Serious Address*, 12. For the sake of clarity, the order of the phrases excerpted in this quotation has been reversed from their position in the original.

Alden Vaughan mentions that Benjamin Franklin employed class language in discussing the uprising, complaining that the Paxton rebels’ “action was almost universally approved by the common people.” Benjamin Franklin to John Fothergill, Mar. 14, 1764, as quoted in Alden Vaughan, “Frontier Banditti and the Indians: The Paxton Boy’s Legacy, 1763–1775,” *Pennsylvania History*, 51 (January 1984): 1–29, 5. Olson argues that social divides were evidenced even in the matter of which Pennsylvanians had access to which political pamphlets, with some elaborately argued and expensively bound pamphlets being aimed at the upper sort while cheaply printed tavern songs were intended to appeal to the lower. See Alison Olson, “The Pamphlet War over the Paxton Boys,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 123 (January/April 1999): 31–55, 36.
- 28 Smith and Gibson, “Remonstrance,” *PA Provincial Council Minutes*, V. IX 140.
- 29 Barton, *Conduct of the Paxton Men*, 7. Smith and Gibson, “Remonstrance,” *PA Provincial Council Minutes*, V. IX, 139. Christa Camenzind argues persuasively that “the brutality of the Paxton Boys” was “integral in the development of the American frontier as a place where white men expressed their manhood through acts of violence against Native Americans.” See Camenzind, “Violence, Race, and the Paxton Boys,” in William A. Pencak and Daniel K. Richter, eds., *Friends and Enemies in Penn’s Woods: Indians, Colonists, and the Racial Construction of Pennsylvania* (University Park, PA, 2004), 204.
- 30 Henry Bouquet, “Colonel Bouquet’s Journal and Conferences with the Western Indians,” *PA Provincial Council Minutes* V. IX, 208–233 (hereafter cited as Bouquet, “Colonel Bouquet’s Journal”). Dowd emphasizes that historians have underplayed the significance of Indians’ use of “words as other powers failed them.” See Dowd, *War Under Heaven*, 162–168: 162.
- 31 Henry Bouquet, “Speech to . . . the Delaware Chiefs with Him at Fort Pitt,” Sept 20, 1764, “Colonel Bouquet’s Journal,” 208–209. On the need for British shows of force during Pontiac’s war, see Jon William Parmenter, “Pontiac’s War: Forging New Links in the Anglo-Iroquois Covenant Chain, 1758–1766,” *Ethnohistory* 4 (Autumn 1997): 617–654, 630.
- 32 “General Amherst to the Governor,” June 12, 1763, Samuel Hazard, ed., *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania, from the Organization to the Termination of the Proprietary Government, Volume IX* (Harrisburg, PA: Theo. Fenn & Co., 1852), 34 (hereafter cited as *PA Provincial Council Minutes*, V. IX); and James Hamilton, “A Message from the Governor to the Assembly,” Oct. 15, 1763, *PA Provincial Council Minutes* V. IX, 58; and “Speech of an Onondago and an Oneida Indian to Col. Bouquet, at Fort Pitt,” Oct. 2, 1764, “Colonel Bouquet’s Journal,” 209.

On connections between compassion and civility, see Elaine Forman Crane, “‘I Have Suffered Much Today’: The Defining Force of Pain in Early America,” in Ronald Hoffman, Mechal Sobel, and Fredrika J. Teute, eds., *Through a Glass Darkly: Reflections on Personal Identity in Early America* (Chapel Hill, 1997), 379; Bernard W. Sheehan, *Savagism and Civility: Indians and Englishmen in Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1980), 38; and Sayre, *Les Sauvages Américains*, 251.
- 33 Henry Bouquet, “At a Conference held with the Senecas and Chiefs living upon the Ohio, the Delawares and Shawanese,” Oct. 20, 1764, “Colonel Bouquet’s Journal,” 218, 219.

- 34 “The Apology of the Paxton Volunteers Addressed to the Candid and Impartial World,” no date, manuscript in the collections of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania reprinted in John R. Dunbar, ed., *The Paxton Papers* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1957), 193.
- 35 George Washington, “To the Inhabitants of Canada,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Oct. 11, 1775.
- 36 For discussion of Aristotle’s theories on the relationship between emotional spirit (*thumos*) and natural slavery vs. natural freedom, see Russell Bentley, “Loving Freedom: Aristotle on Slavery and the Good Life,” *Political Studies* (1999), XLVII, 100–113.
- 37 Bernard Bailyn asserts that connections between social and political slavery were soon to be made and indeed that the battered logic of the proslavery argument “bore the marks ever after” of its encounter with revolutionary rhetoric. See Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 232–246, 238.
- 38 *The New York Mercury*, Dec. 3, 1764.
- 39 For work on the role of emotion in the demonstration of respectability in the eighteenth century, see Jacquelyn Miller, “‘An Uncommon Tranquility of Mind’: Emotional Self-Control and the Construction of a Middle-Class Identity in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia,” *Journal of Social History* 30 (1996): 129–149; and Christina Dallett Hemphill, “Middle Class Rising in Revolutionary America: The Evidence from Manners,” *Journal of Social History* 30 (1996): 317–345. On connections between sensibility and virtue in the “man of feeling,” see Karen Halttunen, “Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture,” *American Historical Review* 100 [1995]: 303–334, 303.
- 40 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Sept. 19, 1765.
- 41 William Smith, *An Historical Account of Colonel Bouquet’s Expedition against the Ohio Indians in the Year 1764* (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1765), 17.
- In colonial North America, Indians functioned vis à vis enslaved Africans much as Julie Ellison argues that North Africans functioned vis à vis sub-Saharan Africans in the Roman Empire depicted in Addison’s *Cato*. Construed as emotionally savage when compared with Europeans, they nonetheless enjoy an enviable reputation when contrasted with Africans. Their comparative emotional advantages thus became a kind of cultural resource that colonists felt free to draw on. Or, As Ellison puts it, their “liminal” status makes them “available for imaginative use” in the development of ideas about the connections between “racial difference” and “emotional difference.” See Julie Ellison, *Cato’s Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago, 1999), 48–49 and 59.
- 42 [Thomas Paine], *Common Sense; Addressed to the Inhabitants of America . . .* (Philadelphia: R. Bell, 1776), 41 and “Introduction.” Note that this is the first edition of *Common Sense*, which was published (without attribution) on Jan. 9, 1776. See also, Craig Nelson, *Thomas Paine: Enlightenment, Revolution, and the Birth of Modern Nations* (New York: Penguin, 2006).
- 43 Paine, *Common Sense* (Bell, 1776), 13, 60.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 41.
- 45 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Mar. 17, 1737. See “Conspire,” def. 1 and def. 4, *OED*. Definition 4, “to concur or agree in spirit, sentiment . . . etc.” is now considered obsolete but was still in current use as late as 1737, according to the *OED*.
- 46 Significantly, Paine published the essays “African Slavery in America,” and “An Occasional Letter to the Female Sex” in the *Pennsylvania Journal and the Weekly Advertiser* in 1775, shortly before beginning work on *Common Sense*. He was also one of the first members of the Pennsylvania antislavery society organized in Philadelphia on April 14, 1775. See Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* (New York, 1969), 15–19, 34–38.

On sensibility in the antislavery movement, see John Wood Sweet, “‘More than Tears’: The Ordeal of Abolition in Revolutionary New England,” *Explorations in Early American*

- Culture* 5 (2001): 118–172; and Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730–1830* (Baltimore, 2003).
- 47 Robert A. Ferguson estimates that *Common Sense* likely went through 120,000–150,000 copies in its first year alone. Richard Gimbel provides a comprehensive bibliography of *Common Sense* editions; *Common Sense* went through 16 Philadelphia print runs, plus 20 more editions across the colonies, plus nearly that many again in Britain, all in 1776 alone. See Robert A. Ferguson, “The Commonalities of Common Sense,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 57 (July, 2000): 465–504, 466 and Richard Gimbel, *A Biographical Check List of Common Sense with an Account of its Publication* (Port Washington, NY, 1956).
- 48 My metaphoric use of the term entailment echoes Brewer’s more literal discussion of the issue. The coincidence is a telling one, for our findings, taken together, show once more the interrelation of reason and emotion and demonstrate that emphasis on either could work equally to tighten lines of authority. See Holly Brewer, “Entailing Aristocracy in Colonial Virginia: ‘Ancient Feudal Restraints’ and Revolutionary Reform,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (Apr. 1997): 307–346, 346; and see Holly Brewer, *By Birth or Consent: Children, Law and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority* (Chapel Hill, 2005).
- 49 *In Congress, July 4, 1776, A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress Assembled* (Philadelphia: John Dunlap [1776]). The Samuel Johnson quote appears in Brown, *Moral Capital*, 122.
- Matthew Mason notes, “Both Britons and Americans claimed to be the standard bearers of human liberation in the Age of Revolution.” See Mason, “The Battle of the Slaveholding Liberators: Great Britain, the United States, and Slavery in the Early Nineteenth Century” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 59, No. 3, Slavery in the Atlantic World (Jul., 2002), 665–696. See also Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2006).
- 50 On the multifaceted tensions leading to open conflict between Britain and the United States, with an emphasis on the desire of US slaveholders to conquer Canada in order to neutralize Indians and expand slavery, see John Latimer, *1812: War with America* (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2010), esp. 25–32.
- 51 On the issue of citizenship restrictions, see Carol Smith-Rosenberg, “Dis-Covering the Subject of the ‘Great Constitutional Discussion,’ 1786–1789,” *Journal of American History* (December 1992): 841–873 and on racial patriarchy in the United States, see Pauline Schloesser, *The Fair Sex: White Women and Racial Patriarchy in the Early American Republic* (New York, 2002).
- For a review of British hypocrisy regarding American sovereignty rights that emphasizes the significance of America’s defense of the citizenship of its natural-born subjects, see Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, & Indian Allies* (New York: Knopf, 2010), esp. chap. four. For a broad introduction to the issues of the war, see Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict, Bicentennial Edition* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2012).
- 52 “Love of Country,” *A National Song-Book Being a Collection of Patriotic, Martial, and Naval Songs and Odes, Principally of American Composition* (Trenton: Comp[iled] and Published by James Wilson, 1813), 112.
- 53 “Mr. Russell to the Secretary of State, dated London, Sept. 17, 1812,” in “State Papers Laid before Congress 12th Congress—2d Session,” pp. 1–226 in Palmer, ed., *The Historical Register, Vol. I* (Philadelphia: Palmer, 1814), 86. Note: There is an idiosyncrasy in the pagination of the edition that comprises volume I. The pagination for volume I runs from 2–164 and then reverts to page 1 on what would otherwise be page 165. The page numbers cited here are from the second run of pagination within volume I.

- 54 “Mr. Russell to the Secretary of State, dated London, Sept. 17, 1812,” in Palmer, ed. *The Historical Register*, Vols. I & II, 86.
- 55 The letter was printed twice in 1812 as a stand-alone pamphlet by the congressional printer in: *Message from the President of the United States, Transmitting Copies of a Communication from Mr. Russell to the Secretary of State . . . November 12, 1812, Read and Ordered to Lie on the Table* (Washington, DC: Weightman, 1812) and *Message from the President of the United States, Transmitting Copies of a Communication from Mr. Russell to the Secretary of State . . . November 12, 1812, Printed by Order of the Senate of the United States* (Washington, DC: Weightman, 1812).

The letter was reprinted in the following newspapers: “Mr. Russell to Mr. Monroe, dated London, September 17, 1812,” Newport *Rhode-Island Republican*, December 3, 1812, 3; “Documents Accompanying the President’s Message to Congress, on November 18, 1812,” Morristown, NJ *Palladium of Liberty*, December 3, 1812, 1; “Documents Accompanying the President’s Message to Congress, on November 18, 1812,” *Windham [CT] Herald*, December 3, 1812, 1; “Mr. Russell to the Secretary of State. London, Sept. 17, 1812,” *Baltimore [MD] Patriot*, January 4, 1813, 1; and “Impressment. For the Patriot,” Providence [RI] August 20, 1814, 2.
- Finally, Russell’s letter was included in two editions of Palmer’s contemporary compendium, both published in 1814, the first edition cited above as well as in a second edition: “Mr. Russell to the Secretary of State, dated London, Sept. 17, 1812,” in “State Papers Laid before Congress 12th Congress—2d Session,” pp. 1–226 in Palmer, ed. *The Historical Register of the United States*, Vol. I, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Palmer, 1814), 86.
- 56 British commentators repeatedly described their nation as the last citadel of liberty in Europe. See, for example, Jon Latimer, *1812: War with America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 19, 35. On Britain’s India problem, see Brown, *Moral Capital*, 203–205.
- 57 Samuel Woodworth, *The Champions of Freedom . . .* (New York: Baldwin, 1816), 226.

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SECTION III

THE EMERGENCE OF A
CONTINENTAL HEGEMON



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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

NATURAL RIGHTS AND NATIONAL GREATNESS

Economic Ideology and Social Policy in the American States, 1780s–1820s



J.M. Opal

During the winter of 1787–88, Col. Alexander Hamilton took time from his law practice to fire off some fifty letters imploring New Yorkers to ratify the federal Constitution. Among his most memorable contributions are the very first of these *Federalist* essays, which took the incapacity of the confederation as self-evident truth, and the eleventh installment, which envisioned “one great American system” instead of many weak and separate states. In terms of economic and social policy, though, Hamilton’s most enduring arguments came near the end of the series, in *Federalist* 78. After assuring readers that they had nothing to fear from the new Judiciary, he spelled out the courts’ power to annul those “unjust and partial laws” that sometimes emerged from “ill humours” in the body politic. No legislature could pass laws obnoxious to the proposed Constitution, he intoned, and only an “independent” court could decide when they had tried. Probably he was thinking of the anti-Loyalist statutes that had threatened some of his own clients since the end of the war. Certainly he was thinking of the pro-debtor laws that had passed in many state assemblies and of proposals in New York and elsewhere for public banks. For Hamilton these measures imperiled the very existence of the social contract and, along with it, the future greatness of the new nation.¹

Thirty years later, Gen. Andrew Jackson emerged from his retirement to condemn similar laws for identical reasons. In response to the Panic of 1819, state legislatures in Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri, and other western states passed aggressive stay and replevin laws (stay laws delayed debt prosecutions while replevin laws enabled debtors to shield or “replevy” some properties from foreclosure). More radical still, they tried to replace chartered private banks with public institutions. All of this was “wild” and “new fangled,” and in violation of “the social compact of the union,” Jackson declared. He raged against the “designing demagogues” who dared to interfere in contracts and praised the independent judges who, he hoped, would uphold each citizen’s absolute right to the debts he was owed. In private letters, Jackson offered advice to the “friends of the Banks,” while in public statements he boasted of his “old republican” principles. Everywhere he declared his ultimate goal to be “national glory,” which he took as a matter of life and death within a brutal world where law mattered less than strength.²

Hamilton and Jackson are normally pictured on opposing ends of the early American political spectrum, and their views on international relations were indeed worlds apart. Hamilton located the United States within a civil society of commercial nations, whereas Jackson embodied a populist disdain for international law rooted in the conviction that America was surrounded by savage foes. When they championed the nation's greatness, then, they had very different things in mind. But in their understanding of the social contract as a mechanism for securing "justice" to creditors whose property claims were just as valid as a yeoman's title to the land he tilled, they were partners in a decades-long project to assert commercial order over American territory. This chapter explores that project at the level of both political theory and social policy, primarily in the northern and western states. In so doing, it also calls attention to the various pro-debtor and "relief" measures that both Hamilton and Jackson hated. Such laws arrived in waves following the economic crises of the 1780s and of 1819–22, provoking fierce debates within state legislatures and drawn-out battles between assemblies and courts over the nature of the social contract, the origin of "real" value, and the purpose of public institutions. Along with a fresh look at some familiar themes and figures in post-Revolutionary America, these debates cast light on its conflicting economic ideologies and the various rights claims they enabled.

Post-Revolutionary settlers in the District of Maine, a disdainful witness observed, sometimes cited "the celebrated *Lock*" to uphold their claims to the lands they worked. John Locke had indeed described the right to property that people gained by mixing their labor with some part of the physical world, a right that anticipated entry into the social compact. For Locke and the liberal theorists he inspired, this was nothing but the first and simplest of property claims, and hardly the most relevant one in a civilized country. For the Maine settlers, on the other hand, it was the only kind of ownership that agreed with notions of justice and equity taken more from Biblical text than Enlightenment sociology. In modern juridical terms, such ordinary folk discovered their property rights in the work that they did. "Industrious" people who did "honest" work on farms and in shops deserved to enjoy "the fruits of their labor." By applying their labor to nature, they earned a natural right to the useful things thus created. Good laws secured that right. Good governments enforced those laws and otherwise allowed some flexibility in the performance of contracts and repayment of debts—abstract property claims that did not carry the same moral and social value as those derived from labor.³

With important regional variations, that was the general argument behind a generation of rural "regulations" that began in the late 1760s and eventually spread from North Carolina to Maine, and from western Pennsylvania to central Massachusetts. Each took issue with the power of lawyers and judges to enforce market outcomes and with state decisions that threatened their independence or their control over their labor and the means of reasonable well-being. That goal spread far beyond the Regulators themselves, emerging as the dominant economic ideology for that large majority of Americans who worked with their hands and as members of households. Especially after 1776, they associated their independence with that of the republic, insisting, as did a group of New York tenants during the 1790s, that the "God of Nature" intended them to live as freeholders, and that "an honest farmer," as the hero of the 1805 play *Independence* boasted, "knows of no dependence

except on heaven.” As an unsympathetic observer noted, they did not believe that republican governments should “secure to their creditors a right to drag them into courts and prisons.” In other words, they did not support a social contract in which the independence they had earned could be lost because of debts they could not pay or lawsuits they could not navigate.⁴

A smaller but more powerful group of Americans embraced just that kind of social contract as progress itself. In the wake of the Revolution, they devised a plan for a *national* commercial society: an extended territory over which the individual right to recover debts was uniform, absolute, and guaranteed by a government strong enough to compete within the trans-national commercial society of civilized nations. This vision of national greatness mapped onto a model of personal success associated with “ambition,” or the desire for notice, fame, and riches beyond local contexts. Ratified with the Constitution in 1788–89, this view was in perpetual tension with the more common notion of independence as the basic goal and natural right of labor. Especially in the northern states, Jeffersonian reformers mediated such conflicts for some two decades. They offered practical steps towards a more open and liberal commercial order, promising to return some natural rights by democratizing access to land, education, and the law. But the Panic of 1819 provoked more radical efforts to secure independence, and the political ferment that ensued ultimately boosted a new kind of nationalism that laid claim to different natural rights.

FEDERALIST PROJECTS

During the early and mid-1780s, most of the new state assemblies passed or debated laws to shelter debtors from the cruel post-war depression. In Pennsylvania, for example, rural counties devastated by mass foreclosures petitioned for a new state bank to increase the money supply and ease the payment of both debts and taxes. In New York, as well, anti-Federalist leaders proposed a loan office roughly modeled on the land banks of colonial times. Virginia and North Carolina simply reinstated their wartime moratoriums on debt collection, which British creditors quickly cited as violations of the 1783 peace treaty. Other relief laws had few or distant precedents. South Carolina’s “Pine Barren Act,” for one, enabled debtors to satisfy obligations with promises of unspecified lands to the west; their creditors grumbled that they would thereby become the proud owners of “barren” forests. Once the dissenter colony that Puritans had loved to hate, Rhode Island became “Rogue’s Island” in genteel opinion when its assembly authorized the emission of paper currency bills backed by state credit.⁵

The inspiration for such acts can be traced back to early modern restrictions on commerce, eighteenth-century traditions of a “moral economy,” or even Biblical stories of the day of Jubilee, when all debts were forgiven. But their most relevant source seems to have been the Revolution itself. Colonial governments, after all, had always served the material interests of well-connected gentry. They did so by granting lands, charters, and lucrative posts in numerous “private bills” each session. With the overthrow of royal institutions, much larger numbers of people argued simply that they, too, ought to be the beneficiaries of government decisions. In effect they argued that there should be something like social policy, rather than just private

acts—and, in most cases, that such policy should favor independence. In its most radical forms this logic called into question any property that did not come from labor. In 1780, for instance, Massachusetts debated a measure to restrict the size of estates to 1,000 acres, under the assumption that anyone who wanted more than that was a speculator instead of a settler.⁶

As Alfred Young once observed, most people in post-Revolution New York wanted the public domain to end up in the hands of many small owners, rather than a few wealthy “jobbers.” And yet “there was no articulate group” at any level of government to demand direct sales in small parcels to actual settlers. Relief measures such as stay laws and money emissions, too, were popular but not cohesive. They relied on local leaders to articulate problems particular to towns, counties, or regions. Such deacons, selectmen, and newcomers to the state assemblies had little influence beyond their locality and none past state boundaries. By contrast, the many opponents of relief laws were not especially popular, but they were highly cohesive. They coordinated policies and exchanged ideas across borders, waiting out the protests of “the people-out-of-doors” and the statutes that followed. In so doing they developed an economic ideology of national greatness that not only proscribed relief measures but also cast aspersions on the goal of household independence those measures were meant to protect.⁷

The starting point for that ideology was the concept of “civil society,” a term used almost interchangeably with “commercial society” by the mid-eighteenth century. The origins and implications of this new and exciting domain of human endeavor was the central preoccupation of many Enlightenment thinkers, especially the Scottish economists and moralists whose influence was so strong in North America. Beginning roughly with Francis Hutcheson’s *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* (1730), and extending to Adam Ferguson’s *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) and Thomas Reid’s *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind* (1788), they rallied to the defense of a new figure in western culture: the individual as a free agent in society, rather than as a subject of a monarch or a member of a household. Such a person need not be a selfish monster, they insisted, and might well hold the keys to human progress.⁸

As Ferguson argued, it was precisely “in conducting the affairs of civil society, that mankind find the exercise of their best talents, as well as the object of their best affections.” Fame was what the great and talented few really wanted: distinction within society, rather than independence from it. Traditionally they had found such fame as a statesman or lawmaker, and certainly that was the success model for someone like Hamilton. But the terms of civil society were not confined to the political realm. They encompassed as well those “enterprising” souls who sought out new markets, thereby creating new legal and moral connections between people and places. Presupposing a poor and brutal past in which the human race divided into isolated and hostile camps, this ideology invested commerce with a positive moral valence. By enabling people to exchange goods beyond local geographies of need and promising them a fair return for their troubles, commercial exchanges pulled humankind towards a world that was kinder and gentler as well as wealthier. The practical side to this heady vision was the absolute obligation of the law to ensure that all those promises were kept—to secure “justice” to those who had risked any part of their property in commercial ventures.⁹

In contrast to the French *philosophes* who sometimes pointed to non-state societies for evidence of innate virtue, the Scots emphasized the moral superiority of civilization. They had little nostalgia for nature. People who lived “under” the civil contract, in their view, had in effect signed a peace treaty, according to which they would now pursue their interests via the law, rather than with force. In particular, they turned over the right to avenge themselves—a “revolution” of greater importance than any other political change, according to Henry Homes, the Lord Kames.¹⁰ And as the primitive stages of hunting and husbandry gave way to agriculture and finally to commerce, more and more people would welcome the gentle embrace of civil society and the rule of law. Cosmopolitan and liberal in spirit, this ideology was openly disdainful of “local prejudices” and “local custom.” It even cast doubt on the moral quality of patriotism. What did national boundaries matter, when society existed wherever laws protected commerce? In enlightened times, people respected the law of nations, which among other things required countries to repay foreign lenders and protect existing titles or contracts. In the hands of a radical like Tom Paine, the concept of civil society was a powerful weapon not only against war-mongering kings, but also against exclusive forms of nationalism.¹¹

Of course, a more conservative plan for civil society—or, rather, for commercial order—arrived the same year Paine published *Common Sense* and Congress declared independence. Adam Smith’s *Inquiry into the Wealth of Nations* had little patience for visionary ideas of universal human society, nor much respect for the petty pursuits of hunters and pastoralists. Smith assumed that commercial nations would live in perpetual competition, no matter how much their people exchanged goods, promises, and sympathy. His goal was to apply the promise of commercial society to national policy. While leaving wages and prices to the discretion of the invisible hand, Smith’s ideal state was “regularly employed” in securing the repayment of debts. It upheld “the faith of contracts” by protecting “the industrious and frugal creditor” from “the idle and profuse debtor.” More than any natural resource, it was this “regular administration of justice” that made nations great. For examples of what not to do, Smith pointed not only to easy targets like Spain and Portugal, but also to those North American colonies that had made “government money” legal tender. Asking creditors to accept such bills was for Smith “an act of such violent injustice as has scarce, perhaps, been attempted by the government of any other country which pretended to be free.”¹²

Like Paine’s incendiary classic, Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* reflected and mobilized ideas more than it created them. By the early 1790s, Hamilton could confidently refer to the text while outlining his ideas on public credit or refuting the early criticisms of the opposition party. Leading men in all the states had already decided that the United States ought to be a great commercial nation. To that end, the first order of (literal) business was to halt the various efforts by state assemblies to delay the repayment of debts and otherwise change the terms of contracts. These “atrocious breaches of moral obligation and social justice,” in Hamilton’s terms, foretold open war between the various states. They cast a harsh light on democratic decision-making, and by extension on human nature itself. Above all, they destroyed “public credit,” the very oxygen of civil society. People had to believe that the laws under which they lived would deliver them their debts upon the terms they had made at the moment of purchase, which in the 1780s often meant phenomenal returns on war bonds snapped up for

pennies on the dollar. Any interference was unwise and unjust, an attack on human progress as led by the talented few and away from the primitive stages of society.¹³

The Federalists largely succeeded in turning that economic ideology into state policy between 1787 and 1801. Article I, Section 10 of the Constitution forbade the pro-debtor relief measures with which the states had been experimenting, stripping member governments of the power to print money, interfere in contracts, or to use anything but gold and silver as legal tender. It also created a judicial branch more insulated from public opinion than that of any state. The state courts were notified that the Constitution was now the final say on any and all statutes; for good measure, the Judiciary Acts of 1789 and 1801 planted federal district and circuit courts in every corner of the republic. The state constitutions drafted or amended after 1789 adopted these new terms of union, so that post-war measures for protecting debtors or limiting speculation lost their institutional footing. And while pushing many ideas and measures off the margins of legitimacy, the Federalists also supported a model of “enterprise” in which private actors directed economic and social changes with the full backing of their state governments.¹⁴

“Roads are the public channels of intelligence and business,” a Connecticut newspaper declared in 1797 on behalf of a proposed turnpike. An improved infrastructure of roads “increases social happiness” and “aids our national prosperity.” And even though they were run by corporate entities whose charters enabled them to charge passersby, turnpikes were *not* private, their supporters insisted. They represented instead a new “spirit of enterprise” animated by a kind of civic ambition: “*Public benefit* is the grand principle which operates in [such] measures.” All but unknown in colonial times, turnpike companies multiplied in the immediate wake of the Constitution. Some 170 were built in New England alone by 1810, reducing transportation costs by 50 percent in many regions. A similar number of academies sprouted over the northern countryside over the same period. Here again, small groups of leading men pooled their money, applied for state charters, and then loudly proclaimed that the schools they had founded were “public,” even though they charged tuition. These schools employed a new motivational regime whose express purpose was to make students “ambitious to excel” in the larger society that stretched far beyond their parents’ farms. Like turnpikes, academies defined themselves against the “narrow” and “contracted” priorities of rural households, whose fixation on mere independence locked away youthful talents and held back social progress.¹⁵

Bullish on human potential but skeptical of human nature, eager to support talent and ambition but also to punish improvidence or misfortune, this ideology is perhaps best summarized by the career of James Wilson, one of just six men to sign both the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. Born in mid-century Scotland, Wilson admired the moral philosophers who described commercial society and hoped to lead a republican version of it in North America. During the war he defended Quakers and Loyalists from confiscation and decried Pennsylvania’s egalitarian Constitution of 1776. He then became one of the most important Federalists in the new nation. Second only to Madison in speaking time at the Great Convention, Wilson was central in securing ratification in the Keystone state, where rural opposition was fierce. In 1790, he helped install a new state constitution with a strong executive and insulated judiciary. By then he was widely seen as the new republic’s leading legal mind, for which he was awarded a seat on the US Supreme Court.¹⁶

More intellectually agile than most of the nation's conservatives, Wilson wanted to expand suffrage to virtually all property holders in order to strengthen the national polity. The rightful origin of the law was consent rather than obedience, he lectured, and so the more people who took part in that consent the better. As it joined the "great commonwealth of nations," the new republic had to respect the customs and treaties that mediated international relations. It had to be a good member of the larger civil society of exchanging peoples, as by honoring treaties, respecting contracts, and protecting the investments of foreign nationals. "How vast—how important—how interesting are these truths!" Wilson's nationalism, in other words, stressed the international dimensions of civil society and the resulting duty to incorporate the law of nations into domestic jurisprudence. In 1796, he condemned an anti-Tory statute from Virginia by citing the leading theorist of the law of nations, Emmerich de Vattel. Government was the "scaffolding of society," the hard core around which commerce would grow and develop. It had to stand firm not only against foreign threats, but also against the wishes of the people it represented.¹⁷

Above all, the government had to make sure that no one escaped their debts. Wilson knew that as well as anyone. As early as 1785, when he defended the Bank of North America against efforts to change its charter, he owed the Bank some \$30,000. Determined to develop American society one "enterprise" at a time, he invested in iron foundries, trading posts, and a would-be town called Wilsonville. He was a partner in so many land companies that it is hard to specify how much property he claimed: thousands of acres in Pennsylvania, tens of thousands of acres in Ohio, *hundreds* of thousands of acres in the Illinois country. By the time he was riding circuit with the Supreme Court in the early 1790s, he was scrambling to find new creditors just to finance his debts. One such creditor, a leading Federalist from South Carolina, had Wilson confined in a North Carolina debtor's jail in 1798. The 55-year-old lasted just long enough to say goodbye to his 24-year-old wife and their 2-year-old son. The commercial state he had done so much to construct worked all too well for James Wilson, pursuing him across the judicial districts over which he presided.¹⁸

JEFFERSONIAN INNOVATIONS

The creation of a national commercial society under the Constitution was quickly followed by an economic boom. Largely the result of the great profits made from neutral shipping in the midst of European war, this upturn allayed the tensions between small producers and "moneyed men" that had dominated state politics during the 1780s. Most farmers, after all, objected not to markets or commerce, but to a political economy in which their labor and independence was ultimately less important than the nation's credit and speculators' profits. Good times papered over that fundamental conflict. From 1793 onwards, far fewer farmers and tradesmen faced foreclosure, while many more sold away their "surplus" to distant buyers. The household economy of farm families thereby coexisted quite well with an economic ideology that more or less disdained them. Indeed, the terrifying magnitude of the French and Haitian Revolutions drove many such families into the ranks of the Federalists, who by the mid-1790s were condemning any "innovation" to America's revolutionary settlement as mortal threats to government, prosperity, and civilization, roughly in that order.¹⁹

The opposition that arose that decade was by necessity a nation-wide alliance of diverse social groups rather than a party by and for independence-minded farmers and tradesmen. The man at its head was also many things to many people: Enlightenment philosopher, progressive farmer, unrelenting Anglophobe, archetypal liberal, and racist slave-owner. Identified more with the Declaration of Independence he had written than the federal Constitution he had condoned, Thomas Jefferson simply fit into the categories that Federalist extremism enabled. He was opposed to the Alien and Sedition Acts, to a new standing army, to direct federal taxes, and to war with France. In their stead he promised simplicity and economy in government, the better to value the modest aspirations of ordinary citizens. Especially in the northern states, this message attracted a broad array of small property-owners and ambitious upstarts who wanted a more democratic version of commercial society.²⁰

They were not wrong to see Jefferson as one of their own. Upon returning to Virginia in late 1776, he spent the better part of a decade attacking those elements of his home state that violated “the rights of human nature.” Most of the lands in tide-water Virginia were locked away in fee tail, reserved in perpetuity to occupant-legatees who could not sell or mortgage these estates nor change the line of descent through first-born sons. Jefferson led the charge against both entail (abolished in 1776) and primogeniture (abolished in 1785): great victories, as he saw it, against the power that the dead had long usurped from the living. He also pushed to provide landless men with the fifty acres necessary to vote. When that failed in 1776, he proposed two years later to give all free-born natives of the commonwealth a 75-acre freehold upon marriage. In a “well-ordered republic,” he recounted in his autobiography, the laws respected nature’s equal apportionment of talent and virtue. They positively favored an original independence long betrayed by unjust social contracts and the “feudal and unnatural distinctions” that followed. He understood church establishments in similar terms: to eliminate Anglican or Congregational privileges was to “*restore* to man all his natural rights.” (His efforts against slavery were much less successful and perhaps less sincere.) In championing such reforms, if in nothing else, Jefferson was consistent. In such reforms, as well, he gave his supporters both inspiration and precedent.²¹

In Delaware, for example, the Enlightenment radical and Jeffersonian statesman Robert Coram summarized his political creed with this sentence: “To make men happy, the first step is to make them independent.” Or, rather, the first step was to *re-make* them independent. In nature, as among the natives of North America, equality and independence were the rule. But civilization had deprived man of rights that the beasts of the forest and the birds in the sky still enjoyed, taking from him the liberty to roam about in search of “the means of subsistence.” Coram was especially disgusted by the vagrancy laws that made poor people aliens in their own country. Such laws had been planted like weeds in the New World garden. Worse, the American people had recently elected to follow British-style laws by adopting the harsh and aristocratic Constitution. What to do? “I am not quite so visionary, as to expect that the members of any civilized community will listen to an equal division of land,” Coram assured his readers in his 1791 essay, *Political Inquiries*. Rather he found a “substitute” for natural independence in public, universal, and obligatory education. Since children were roughly equal in their capacities, all they needed was a good education “secured by government to every class of citizens [and] every child in the state” to learn how to provide for themselves.²²

Coram was adamant that the government owed something to everyone. As the enforcer of a social contract that had taken as much as it had given, the state was morally obliged to “furnish the people with means of subsistence” and thereby promote the equality and independence left behind in nature. That was the great promise of education, not the genteel manners and cutthroat rivalry he found in academies. In 1796, after years of petitioning by Coram and the democratic organizations he supported, Delaware passed the School Fund Act: a promise, if only a paper one, to deliver some sort of formal education to every child in the state. New York made a similar change to its social contract between 1795 and 1797, organizing a state-wide Regents system to pay for teachers and schools in every community. The Regents also required annual reports from the academies, trying to integrate these institutions into a public system, rather than to replace them altogether.²³

The Jeffersonians behind these reforms stressed that “extending the benefits” of education would not only protect the populace from unscrupulous leaders but also insure that “the poor boy of industry and genius” would not be “kept down” by the accidents of birth. In New York and in the republic as a whole, Gov. DeWitt Clinton proclaimed, there were no “privileged orders” to “create distinct classifications in society.” To the contrary there were—or ought to be—institutions to prevent such classes from appearing. That called for a vigorous “spirit of reformation,” a proactive effort to rid the polity of those “artificial” laws that lingered on from colonial times and were sure to reappear as new elites emerged. Addressing the Tammany Society in 1796, the Jeffersonian leader Tunis Wortman targeted “those rigid and penal codes of law that have subverted the natural liberties of mankind” and that remained on the books in spite of the Revolution. To whip or hang petty criminals and to imprison debtors was to follow the “monkish and dishonorable doctrine” of human depravity. It was to believe that people had to be scared into good behavior, all while making poor people more miserable than they would have been had they stayed in the woods. A “well organized society,” Wortman proclaimed, followed instead a “liberal and benevolent philosophy” based on “the Omnipotent hand of nature.” After years of intense pressure, the Federalist Governor of New York accepted a major liberalization of the state’s penal code in 1797.²⁴

The key idea that people like Coram and Wortman introduced to state-level legislation was that the natural state of mankind had much to recommend it. In nature, people had been free, equal, and independent. By nature, they deserved to remain so. That was the lodestar for the Enlightened statesman, who wanted above all to make “the whole family of man” more happy. Rather than the vague and distant imaginary it was for most Federalists, the state of nature for these reformers was a relevant source of political reasoning, indeed a guide to social policy. Not simply anti-statist, this “spirit” authorized policies that qualify as progressive in the modern sense: designed to prevent people from being exploited or repressed by other people, and to enable them to live more or less as they wanted—trusting, as Jefferson did, that natural liberties never threatened social duties. It found its canonical expression during the 1790s in the later writings of Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason* excepted: Part II of *The Rights of Man* (which called for universal education and old-age insurance) and *Agrarian Justice* (which proposed a National Fund from which all 21-year-olds would receive a stipend).²⁵

But the only way to provide for the independence of America's burgeoning white population without wholesale redistribution was to take more land from native peoples, who were conveniently associated with the horrific crimes Jefferson accused them of in the Declaration of Independence. (A few minutes after praising "the equality of man," one New York Jeffersonian called Indians "more ferocious" than poisonous animals, presumably snakes.) Most Jeffersonians were avid supporters of white expansion, and the more radical ones sought to insure the equitable use of those "public lands" taken from Indians and Loyalists. In New York they proposed to use land sales to pay for the Regents system. They condemned the "ruinous system of speculation" whereby 3.5 million acres—half of the state's public domain—had sold at firesale prices to one of the state's wealthiest Federalists in 1791. On the Maine frontiers, Jeffersonians were willing to concede that the land "in a state of nature" belonged to a handful of Federalist proprietors so long as the settlers got some credit for the improvements they had made. The Maine Betterment Act of 1808 granted secure title to the more prosperous settlers while forcing the poorer ones to either accept dependent status or quit the land altogether—in effect, to become the "white Indians" that they had sometimes pretended to be.²⁶

The historian Joyce Appleby once commented that one could trace the regional origins of Jefferson's party by following the Congressional votes for the proposed Land Act of 1796, which sought to restrain the extravagant speculation in which James Wilson had once trafficked. The key proposal to reduce the minimum purchase size of public lands to 160 acres had to wait until 1804, just after Jefferson had navigated the Louisiana Purchase through his own Constitutional scruples and the Federalists' despairing opposition. In this way, Jefferson and his state-level followers worked in tandem to pass pro-independence social policy—mostly at the expense of those entirely outside the polity. A master of persuasion, the President sometimes convinced himself that the Indians would welcome Anglo-American agricultural society. To his frontier agents he suffered no such illusions. "Commerce is the great engine by which we are to coerce them, and not war," he wrote to Meriwether Lewis in 1808. Federal officials were to promote such commerce at the many new trading posts Jefferson was paying for along the frontier. More exchanges would mean more tribal debt, which the natives would only be able to satisfy by selling away more lands. In Jeffersonian political economy, debt-ridden natives, rather than debt-ridden farmers, would face the harsh core of commercial society.²⁷

In looking back on the Virginia reforms of which he was so proud, Jefferson regretted that his plan for public schooling had run aground on a 1796 statute giving the county courts the power to implement free education. "The justices, being generally of the more wealthy class, were unwilling to incur that burden," and the system never got off the ground. School reforms in Delaware, New York, and elsewhere suffered the same fate, so that the principle of universal public education preceded its implementation by at least a generation. That was as much the fault of the ascendant Jeffersonians as the declining Federalists. Unwilling to alienate rural constituencies with new taxes, they looked instead for various ways to deliver mass education on the cheap. And was it not the Sage of Monticello who railed against unnecessary taxes and useless offices? Had he not made economy in government one of the cardinal rules of the empire of liberty?²⁸

Everywhere, moderate Jeffersonians split off from the more radical “Democratic-Republicans,” turning back reforms that seemed too daring, too idealistic, or just too expensive. They preferred to talk about the natural harmony of interests *within* commercial society, trusting that the unequal outcomes would accurately reflect talent, industry, and virtue itself. Indeed, most of the young lawyers, merchants, and entrepreneurs gravitating to the majority party had no interest in restoring natural rights to anyone. They simply wanted to expand access to credit and commerce so that they—and the republic with which they identified—could surpass mere independence. Such men were especially important in halting scattered efforts during the early national period to replace common law with civil law.²⁹

Consider the fight over so-called arbitration laws during the 1790s and early 1800s. During the worst of the post-war depression, local populations had protected their debtor-neighbors by refusing to convict them of having defaulted on a loan, no matter what the evidence. They preferred more informal “arbitrations” to settle disputes. These would be free of both arcane common law and expensive lawyers, who were so unpopular during the 1780s that communities from Massachusetts to Tennessee proposed their outright abolition. Pro-creditor interests had fought back by requiring suits to be tried far from the defendants’ home, in common law courts where lawyers and judges ruled, instead of juries. During the 1790s, some radical Jeffersonians, including Robert Coram in Delaware, tried to prevent such measures from hardening into the status of constitutional law. They failed. As the economy boomed, however, a wider coalition of reformers began to clamor for arbitration statutes to help not only debtors, but also emergent creditors.³⁰

In a society as commercial as the United States, remarked the Jeffersonian *National Intelligencer* in 1803, any laws that sought to inhibit debt collection “would be deemed the temerity of innovation.” Such laws would violate the Constitution and betray the basic promise of civil society. Far better, the article argued, to make the recovery of debt “easy, prompt, and unexpensive” by creating what amounted to small-claims courts: arbitration councils to decide cases involving less than \$100 or so of property. In that way, people could work out their disputes without lawyers. In that way, too, up-and-coming merchants would no longer be victimized by undue “indulgence” to debtors. Against the opposition of many lawyers, all Federalists, and the Jeffersonian Governor, Pennsylvania’s Democratic-Republicans passed an Arbitration law in 1806. It enabled two consenting parties to settle their property disputes through mutually chosen “referees,” with a jury to be used in case the defendant refused their judgment. Of course this did not prevent a Philadelphia merchant from dragging an unwilling rural debtor into court. Nor did it help the truly penniless, since only freeholders could stay the execution of the referees’ judgment. Otherwise, payment was due in thirty days.³¹

THE POLITICS OF PANIC

Although he believed the United States to be uniquely suited for a lasting sort of liberty, Jefferson did not see himself primarily as a nationalist. Nor did his more radical followers. They were too much the products of Enlightenment “liberality” and too far invested in natural rights ideology to delimit their ideas in that way. They argued deductively from universal and natural rights, applying at the state or

national level what they took to be global and transcendent truths. But the republic's long struggle against the British Empire gave rise to a popular nationalism that found its home in the Democratic-Republican ranks. Jeffersonian radicals had long targeted the British state as especially "artificial," for it secured a set of monopolies—the aristocracy, the Church, the Crown—by denying people the right to "improve" land, to emigrate, and even to hunt and fish. From 1807 on, British efforts to man the Royal Navy through impressments, and to check American expansion, confirmed all of these ideas. More than violations of international law, these were crimes against the natural rights of all people to seek greener pastures, to expatriate themselves, indeed to marry and have children.³²

This is why victory (more or less) in the War of 1812 was such a significant psychological and ideological event. It vindicated not just American independence but also an emergent narrative of the American people as naturally virtuous, prosperous, and powerful. So, too, did the post-war boom. In a most Jeffersonian fashion, state and national authorities enabled and encouraged a boom in *both* settlement and speculation to cope with heavy deficits and massive land cessions. Kentucky alone chartered forty new banks from 1817 to 1818, while the authorized capital of two of Tennessee's three banks surged by over 400 percent during 1817 alone. Thousands of citizens from these and other states used those notes to buy a piece of what had been the Creek Nation, now Mississippi and Alabama. No one much cared that most of the banks were issuing promises vastly out of proportion to their capacities, because high crop prices powered still more speculation in all the lands being settled. What could go wrong?³³

As European farms and markets recovered from the Napoleonic Wars, the price of American exports stagnated and then collapsed. From January 1818 to June 1819, the price of cotton tanked by 50 percent, taking with it all the promises that had been made on the basis of crop revenues. British creditors felt the wind shift and began calling back loans, and the Second Bank of the United States made matters worse by pulling money out of circulation just as the bubble burst. By the summer of 1819, many western banks announced that they would no longer "redeem" the notes they had issued, even though their charters obliged them to do so. "Times are dreadfull here," reported Andrew Jackson from Nashville. "[C]onfidence entirely destroyed, specie payments suspended, and no foreign notes to be got—and upwards of six hundred suits returnable to our last County Court." Once again, debt suits and sheriff's auctions forced Americans to consider the fundamental purpose of the social compact: to protect creditors and enforce contracts so that the nation could survive in an unforgiving world; or to promote some independent social good, which for most Americans meant independence itself.³⁴

Among the first *potential* victims of the Panic were those who had succumbed to "Alabama fever" and snapped up the lands opened by Jackson's destruction of the Creek Nation. They owed some \$23 million—not to speculators, but to the federal government that had transformed the conquered lands into saleable property. The Federal Land Act of 1820 simply changed the terms of repayment. Any holder of public lands could purchase only that fraction of acreage for which he could currently pay. A settler who could only manage payment for 50 of the 100 acres he had bought could keep those 50 acres rather than surrender the whole. The Act also reduced the minimum purchase price of each acre and enabled settlers to buy back

“their” lands at a discount. It thereby spared the nation’s two newest states from a vast flood of foreclosures. President Monroe called this a “reasonable indulgence” to those caught up in economic forces they could not control, not to mention an easy way to populate the Gulf Coast frontier with white Americans. The measure passed by a decisive 97–40, with resistance limited to New England and to specific interests along the western frontier.³⁵

Renegotiating debts in which the government itself acted as creditor was one thing. Intervening in the innumerable private contracts that the Panic had imperiled was quite another. Given how thoroughly such measures had been marginalized since (and by) the Founding, it is remarkable to see how quickly and loudly they returned to public life. “RELIEF,” recalled one US Senator, was the “universal demand thundered at the doors of all legislatures,” especially those “south and west of New England.” Even in the northeast some kind of emergency intervention seems to have been popular during the first harrowing months. In the thirty years since the last depression, though, sustained growth and commercial development had accommodated many farmers to the merchant interests they had once maligned. The crisis was also less severe in the northeast, where banks were more cautious and the economy more diversified than in staple-growing regions. The legislatures in Massachusetts and New York easily beat back relief proposals, while anti-relief leaders in Vermont stalled stay legislation until the state’s circuit court struck it down.³⁶

In the mid-Atlantic states, relief sentiment was strong in tobacco- and cotton-producing counties and in newer regions where people had borrowed money to buy new lands, tools, and livestock. Farmers here were watching their estates sold at auction for a fraction of their “real” value—not the actual price they could bring in the depths of the Panic, but rather the deeper worth rendered by years of labor. Their representatives thus proposed minimum appraisal laws, whereby no debtors’ property could be sold off at auction unless the proceeds brought in three-quarters of the pre-crash value as determined by state officials. Delegates from Virginia’s wealthier counties replied that it was “worse than vain” to try to measure value in this way, and that the only “cure” for the crisis was to compel the debtor to “pay the consequences of his own folly of impudence.” They defeated the minimum appraisal law, 113–74. In North Carolina, as well, the Governor called for new protections for the “intrinsic value” of humble properties. In the face of determined opposition from conservative legislators from wealthy counties, he succeeded only in passing a replevin law for those who had bought lands taken from the Cherokee.³⁷

Relief arguments were most cohesive and popular in the West. One of Missouri’s pro-relief writers called himself “Nine-Tenths of the People,” and its legislature eventually passed a sweeping replevin law backed by a new state loan office. Assemblies in Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, and Tennessee followed a similar pattern: first, they issued stay and replevin laws holding off creditors for up to two years, and then they incorporated new public banks to enhance the money supply and reduce litigation. These measures were deliberately intertwined. In Kentucky, for example, creditors were asked to accept the notes of the new “Bank of the Commonwealth.” If they did so, their debtors had to pay within three months. But if they refused those notes, their debtors could replevy property for two years. As usual, the states sought to finance their measures by land sales, which again meant

wresting control of “unclaimed” land from land companies and speculators. From 1818 to 1820, Kentucky also considered bills to make bank owners personally liable for bills issued and answerable at all times to public officials. In 1821, the state’s new Governor promised that his government would not “witness in silence the general wreck of private independence and public prosperity,” even if the market wanted it so.³⁸

These efforts drew together the most radical tendencies in Jeffersonian thought, envisioning as they did popular control over credit and currency as well as land and debt. “This new Bank is the Bank of the people,” one Tennessee supporter declared, “and we believe it is the duty of the old banks to deposit with [it].” When opponents noted that both lenders and buyers outside of state boundaries would heavily discount the bills, the pro-relief leader Felix Grundy conceded as much. The avowed goal was to protect those in danger of losing their independence within the state of Tennessee, not to worry overmuch about extra-local investments. In this way, Grundy disclosed the fundamental orientation of class conflict in early national America: not rich versus poor, employer versus worker, or even creditor versus debtor, but local versus cosmopolitan. He also articulated a public authority that operated above and against the private interests of chartered banks and distant creditors. The Lt. Governor of Kentucky similarly described a “visitorial superintending power” that enabled and compelled the state to act in the face of emergency.³⁹

Relief supporters argued that the rightful home of that power was the legislature, the most democratic element of the polity and the one most transformed by the crisis. In Tennessee, pro-relief forces put together a slate of candidates for office, physically presenting themselves for election at the state house in July 1819. This unprecedented challenge to the state’s long-dominant gentry factions brought a 42 percent surge in voter turnout in Davidson County, home of Nashville and Andrew Jackson. The next year, the state held seven special elections for state office; the winner of Davidson’s special vote was Grundy, the brainchild of the public bank (and also an anti-British “warhawk”). In Kentucky, such legislators formally organized as the Relief Party. It dominated the assembly for five years. “Our Legislature consists almost entirely of new members,” a worried Henry Clay wrote in November 1819 to the President of the Second Bank of the United States. A year later he noted that “the unfavorable laws to creditors” might threaten the collection of debts by eastern creditors.⁴⁰

Yet Clay doubted that any “measure of violence” would ever materialize. For twenty years, he had been Kentucky’s leading voice for new bank and turnpike charters, brushing aside all kinds of resistance from local interests and radical Jeffersonians. He saw the relief movement as another fist shaken at progress itself: unpleasant, to be sure, but hardly cause for another panic. Inside state legislatures, foes of relief fought tooth and nail against all those “unfavorable laws.” They extracted crucial concessions, most notably by reducing the authorized capital of the new public banks and securing appointments to the committees that would oversee relief measures. Outside the legislatures, these same men and their allies offered direct resistance as the heads of private banks, refusing to accept the state bills regardless of the associated stay and replevin laws. Some were even willing to starve their banks into extinction, for they stood to lose nothing more than initial investments already devastated by the Panic. They also saturated the newspapers they controlled with a

steady stream of anti-relief arguments. The hard times were not really so bad, they declared. Anyway, the answer was “industry and simplicity” rather than unwise, unjust, and un-Constitutional laws.⁴¹

To his many correspondents from Frankfort to Philadelphia, Clay counseled patience. The storm would pass. The relief measures would disappear sooner or later, for even if their supporters were sufficiently organized for sustained political combat, the courts would strike them down. As early as 1795, one of the new federal district courts had annulled a Pennsylvania statute for interfering in contracts, as did the supreme court of North Carolina in 1814. The nation’s highest court repeatedly affirmed the supremacy of Article I, Section 10 over any and all state measures, most importantly in the 1819 cases *Sturges vs. Crownshield* and *Dartmouth College vs. Woodward*. At the state level, the key decisions regarding the Panic-induced relief measures began in the summer of 1821—after two crucial years of reprieve for debtors. The Tennessee Supreme Court ruled that its stay law interfered in the performance of contracts, and that no contrary claim concerning the welfare of the people or the emergency powers of government really mattered. Courts in Missouri and Illinois reached the same conclusion, thereby destroying the credit of the public bank bills. Who would accept the notes of a bank whose very existence had just been declared unconstitutional?⁴²

Refusing to back down, Kentucky’s Relief Party held an expensive bonfire in January 1823, torching \$70,000 in notes from the Bank of the Commonwealth in hopes of enhancing the value of the \$2,000,000 still in circulation. But that October, two appeals from disgruntled creditors came to the Bourbon Circuit Court, whose justices made clear that paying back debts was “a duty of strict justice.” A debt was property like any other. Should any government forsake its charge to protect that property, “the bands of civil society would be dissolved, and men would again revert to a state of nature.” Kentucky’s fundamental obligation was to its individual members rather than to “the welfare of the community,” and that obligation dovetailed with its membership in the American union and indeed with “the principles of international law.” So, the December 1820 replevin law and the bank tied to it were both void. The Kentucky legislature first annulled the court’s decision and then abolished the court in question—an extreme example of the far-ranging struggle between state legislatures and judiciaries during the early republic. For the next several years, two court systems operated within the state, one loyal to the pro-relief legislature, and the other to the judges who warned that relief measures meant a “return to a state of nature.”⁴³

In Kentucky and elsewhere, though, the hard times had already passed, and the rush to narrate what had happened—to say whether relief had helped or hurt—began. The economic consequences of the relief laws are difficult to measure, because their effects were both negative (they prevented foreclosures and debt suits that would otherwise turn up in the records) and muted (they were struck down beginning in 1820). What *is* clear is that the first draft of history that came out during the early 1820s did not look kindly on relief. The state banks had been just as partial and corrupt as any other bank, according to this story, while the confusing stay and replevin laws had mostly helped shady and improvident people escape their obligations. “Honest” citizens preferred simpler remedies. Ohio emerged as the star witness of the anti-relief narrative, even though it actually had a minimum appraisal law in

place since 1803. During the crisis, one paper noted vaguely and eloquently, Ohio's legislature had "put down a host of swindling banks, banished a spurious medium, and restored the good old currency." They had thereby "cherished the industry of her citizens" rather than sow divisions within the people.⁴⁴

JACKSONIAN SETTLEMENTS

If Henry Clay was one of the more savvy foes of relief, Andrew Jackson was among its most vociferous. One of the original stockholders in Nashville's major private bank, the General was also a close friend and political ally of the state's most influential banker and judge, John Overton. The new Bank of Tennessee and the stay and replevin laws tied to it posed an unprecedented threat. In June 1820, Jackson and a handful of Nashville elites countered with an anti-relief proclamation that wondered why "so much sympathy should be indulged for the *debtor*, and none for the *creditor*." It predicted ruin if the measures passed. In a dramatic gesture, the General also presented himself at the steps of the state legislature in Knoxville. There he confronted those making their way into the hall, warning them that anyone who voted for the relief measures would be breaking the oath they had taken to the state and federal constitutions. They would be guilty of perjury. This was the kind of charge that people fought duels over (as Jackson well knew), and two state senators were so appalled that they prepared a formal rebuke of the General's "dictatorial, indecorous, and intemperate" attack.⁴⁵

In public statements and private letters from 1820 to 1823, Jackson attacked state banks and renegotiated contracts as "the new fangled projects of wild speculators and unsound politicians." All of the relief measures were in direct violation of Article I, Section 10 of the US Constitution and thus "not voidable, but absolutely void." With Tennessee's relief laws safely struck down in 1821, he focused his rage on Kentucky. To his nephew he explained that this once great state was "only part of the people of the u[nited] states" and thus bound to obey the terms of the national charter. No room for Jeffersonian states' rights language here: Kentucky was not "an independent government." In his letters, the newly elected legislators became "Demagogues" and "Despots"; the people, or rather the courts, had to stop them "in their mad career, and on their native dunghills set them down." Revisiting the Federalist rationale for judicial review, Jackson insisted that the people's sovereignty inhered in the *Constitution*, not in assemblies, statutes, or any other democratic institution. "The People," in this sense, had only been sovereign at the moment of constitutional creation, and were thenceforth prohibited from doing anything against the founding charter. He swore to oppose relief measures "as long as I live."⁴⁶

Jackson's neo-Federalist response to the relief movement was perfectly consistent with his entire public career, beginning with his 1788 move to mid-Tennessee. He and Overton were among the first shock-troops of state and federal authority in the Mero District: Jackson as attorney general and Overton as excise collector. Jackson made his name during the 1790s chasing down debtors and, when necessary, removing squatters. His political benefactor, William Blount, was the region's foremost Federalist and speculator who took part in Tennessee's governance in order to secure the vast acreages he claimed in the region. With the contacts and information they obtained as lawyers, Jackson and Overton formed a partnership in 1794 whereby

they bought up land titles and then used the resulting proceeds to finance trading ventures. During his first trip to Philadelphia in 1795, for example, Jackson sold a 50,000 acre tract he had just acquired to pay for trade goods to be shipped from the east coast to Tennessee.⁴⁷

Jackson's fortunes took an early hit when a partner whose notes he had endorsed first died and then defaulted. Many historians have interpreted this as a turning point in his political and economic views, and it does seem to have instilled in Jackson a certain distrust of distant credit. Both he and Overton also liked to associate themselves with the tranquility of their favorite plantations: "the Hermitage" and "Traveler's Rest," respectively. But their careers were dedicated to commerce and speculation, on the one hand, and to associated legal and political labors, on the other. Jackson was a general merchant until 1809, when he stopped due to thin profit margins. In 1808, he bought fifty shares in the Nashville Bank, and spent much of his time tracking down debts and prosecuting a range of law suits spawned by his own speculations. After the War of 1812, he made it known to his contacts in Washington and Philadelphia that he knew where to find the best lands in the newly conquered Gulf Coast and was happy to sell that information to absentee bidders. "This section of country," he assured potential investors, "present to the capitalist greater prospects of advantage—than any other." For his part, Overton served on the state's Superior and Supreme Courts from 1804–9 and 1811–16, in which capacity he wrote or helped to write Tennessee's land statutes and served as Jackson's lawyer.⁴⁸

As a product of Federalist state-making and an exemplar of early national ambition, it never occurred to Jackson that property held in titles, debts, or contracts was any less "real" than that created by manual labor. He obviously did not see independence as a satisfying goal. Nor did he associate occupancy with legitimacy, although he came to see a larger national need for occupant-settlers in disputed territories. His own investments and accounts spread hundreds of miles south and east of mid-Tennessee, and he repeatedly identified with those "honest creditors" who struggled to track down what they were owed. To delay payment through relief measures was theft, Jackson wrote in 1820, and he would have no part of the "modern" morality behind it. As Overton approvingly noted, Jackson had also been a "firm and inflexible Judge" on the Tennessee Supreme Court: a rigid adherent to the rule of constitutional and commercial law. Indeed, Jackson sounded much like one of Kentucky's ultra-conservative judges, who argued in 1823 that the "national principle" of the Constitution was "to impose an obligation upon all the states to give free course to the coercion of contracts."⁴⁹

That this man became the most popular democratic leader since Jefferson is important not because either President directly controlled the social policies of the various states, but because they were the nation-wide symbols and personalities around or against which the republic's many different elites, factions, and movements organized. They set the terms of political debate and the range of political choices. In the wake of the "Revolution of 1800," a wide spectrum of popular and emerging leaders had seen in Jefferson a natural rights reformer and legislator. Their efforts to expand access to land, law, and education bore the tacit approval and ideological imprimatur of the man who had declared independence. At the foundation of those efforts was the belief in a positive civil society that returned some of the rights of

nature, including, to the extent possible, the right to independence. Jackson saw himself as a loyal Jeffersonian, and his politics bore a superficial resemblance to those of the third president. But he had very different ideas about both civil society and the state of nature—and so, perforce, did the movement he led.⁵⁰

What did Americans know about Andrew Jackson as of the early 1820s? That he was a war hero, of course. He had conquered the invading British hordes at the gates of New Orleans in 1815, thus sparing the women of the Crescent City from the mass rape that the British commander had promised his men. (No British commander had made any such promise, but His Majesty's government did not prove this until 1831, long after the myth had taken root.) But Jackson was equally known for his invasion of Spanish Florida in early 1818. After taking over all the Spanish forts and burning all the Seminole towns he found, he had personally directed the execution of two British nationals found helping the natives and fugitive slaves. Parliament did not appreciate that. Neither did Congress, which noted that Jackson had waged war without its authorization. In early 1819, before the "firebell in the night" over Missouri, Americans were thus focused as never before on a Congressional debate, this one over Jackson's conduct in Florida. For 27 days they heard or read speeches denouncing the General for having broken international law, forsaken Christian mercy, and otherwise sullied the republic's reputation among "civilized nations." They also heard a greater number lionize him as the people's "great avenger" within a world of savages, outlaws, runaways, and pirates.⁵¹

In his own speeches and proclamations, too, Jackson presented himself not just as a military man, but as a military man who served the people *in spite of* their government. He perfected this narrative during the War of 1812, when he issued General Orders that were widely re-published. "The hour of national vengeance is now at hand," he told his Tennessee volunteers in March 1812. "Your government has at last yielded to the impulse of the nation." Both he and his men "burned" to purify heathen lands with "fire and sword," he declared, and yet their government would not let them. In these issues of national defense and citizens' security, rather than in questions of political economy, Jackson broke angrily and loudly with federal authority—and tapped into powerful currents of nationalist rage and pride. The nation was the entire population of white Americans, especially the (tiny) part of it that lived in frontier households forever exposed to the most horrid traumas. Jackson was the instrument of their vengeance. In popular biographies, as well, he appeared as a warrior who freely indulged in the well-earned rage of frontier families, indeed of an entire nation long abused and humiliated by the British and others. Here was no distant, neoclassical hero in the mould of Washington, but a flesh-and-blood man of many faults, a man who never pretended to be better than the people he avenged.⁵²

This close identification between Jackson and an aggrieved, emotional form of nationalism concealed the General's views on relief. In mid-Tennessee, to be sure, his arch-conservative stance was common knowledge. This may explain why Jackson and his confidantes decided against a run for Governor in 1822 (his would-be opponent, though also against relief measures, was very popular for his denunciations of banking privileges and debt imprisonment). Beyond Nashville, though, I have found only a single newspaper that drew attention to Jackson's anti-relief diatribe of 1820. Indeed, many more members of the reading public probably saw Jackson as vaguely *associated* with the relief movement he so hated, or at least with the popular anger

that the Panic had provoked but not defined. The explanation traces to Kentucky, where the Relief Party correctly linked their foes with the Federalists of old. In the wake of the War of 1812 that meant linking them to the Hartford Convention, where New England's Federalists flirted with secession, if not treason. When a pro-relief writer in one Kentucky paper assured his readers that "General Jackson says he would have hanged [these men] if it had been the last act of his life," several editors around the country reprinted the essay. Universally identified as the man who struck terror in the hearts of America's enemies, Jackson was thereby freed from his own record as staunch foe of popular relief and of at least one kind of state sovereignty.⁵³

If the relief movement won a single lasting victory, it was against the practice of consigning debtors to prison to compel repayment. Kentucky and North Carolina both moved against this common law inheritance in the early 1820s, and Governor Carroll in Tennessee tried to follow suit. Most anti-relief leaders in the western states could live with the change, and some welcomed it as a way to expedite the liquidation of property through civil actions. Otherwise, supporters of relief found that the legal "scaffolding" of commercial society deprived them of any staying power. By the mid-1820s, the public banks, in particular, were common targets of ridicule and frustration. Surveying the political scene as of the mid-1820s, anti-relief leader John J. Crittenden assured Clay that the "the relief or judge-breaking party" was much weakened. His only concern was that they had "some how succeeded in identifying with them the name and pretensions of Gen[eral] Jackson, not a little to his prejudice." This alliance between Jackson supporters and the relief men was "artificial," Crittenden perceived, and it linked only the leaders rather than the rank-and-file. "There is in truth nothing in common between the parties to unite them." As another of Clay's confidantes reported, the only chance for "the reliefs" was to grab onto the "floating capital" of Jackson's name.⁵⁴

A new dynamic in national politics now divided the more established anti-relief elites with a broader constituency that increasingly despaired of governmental intervention of all kinds. The former naturally cohered around John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, and other unapologetic insiders. The latter condemned not just private interests allied with state authority, but state authority itself, which was inherently corrupt, venal, and insufficiently American. The answer for this popular and populist movement was no longer to use social policy to promote even so agreeable a goal as household independence, but to roll back all public institutions to the minimal scope enshrined in the Constitution. It was to liberate the people and nation from uncaring elites who were too concerned with European opinion and too solicitous of native rights. In this way, a new anti-government nationalism that came out of real and imagined violence with America's enemies aligned with a renewed political consensus about the need to contain the democratic iterations of popular assemblies. As a Pennsylvania radical who had long opposed "corporate privileges for trade and business" despaired, "Jacksonism was mixing in everything, and absorbing everything."⁵⁵

In the US Senate from 1823 to 1825, Jackson voted like the moderate Jeffersonian he was on most fiscal and constitutional issues. He was in favor of federal projects that seemed important to national security, especially in light of the transportation and supply difficulties he had seen during the war. He assented to a bill restricting imprisonment for debt in cases before US courts, which narrowly failed in the face

of eastern and conservative opposition. Mostly he stayed quiet. Beginning in 1822, John Overton and a few other Nashville elites began to manage Jackson's campaign, resulting in a more measured tone in his correspondence. Knowing that the General's checkered past worried some important people, Overton gave speeches in which Jackson was "calm in deliberation [and] cautious in decision," a loyal soldier who had learned from his youthful imprudence. In an 1825 oration, he claimed that Jackson had willfully submitted to civilian authority following the Battle of New Orleans, embracing "the umpire of law" and civilian control over the military. For his part, Jackson insisted that "I have nothing in my political creed to keep secrete." That creed was "formed in the old republican school, and is without change."⁵⁶

When word arrived that another military figure had taken the nation's right to self-defense into his own hands, however, Jackson proudly counted himself a radical of sorts. In the wake of the Seminole War, American naval commanders moved to clear Florida's coastline of its many pirates, whose abductions had already replaced stories of Indian atrocity in the American reading market. In October 1824, Commodore David Porter briefly landed at Fajardo, Puerto Rico and threatened to burn the village to the ground unless the locals apologized for having mistreated one of his men (who in turn had been asking about monies owed to an American firm). Porter defended his actions on the precedent set by Jackson in Florida. The Puerto Ricans deserved "chastisement," Porter argued, and he gave it to them. If his actions were criminal, he shrugged, "I am tenfold criminal, in the numerous fishing huts I have destroyed on the coasts of Cuba." His duty was not to cater to international law but to defend American citizens or interests wherever they happened to be.⁵⁷

This incident led to another Congressional debate about the terms and limits of national "defense." The most daring proposal would have allowed naval vessels not only to chase pirates onto Caribbean islands but also to impose a blockade over ports where the banditti might be hiding. A blockade was universally understood as an act of war, and thus as something that Congress would have to authorize. The bill's authors thus proposed to give the President and the Navy—not Congress—the power to approve such actions. Naturally such a bill had little chance of passing the legislative body whose authority it proposed to weaken. But a militant minority attacked the "idolatrous reverence" for the law of nations, appealing instead to America's natural and inherent "right of self-preservation." One supporter imagined the pirates wiping their bloody swords and counting their booty, secured by the musty parchments of European treaties and theories. The United States, he said, had to "cause vengeance to reach them . . . [and] teach them [that] there is another country strong enough to seize them in their recesses and drag them to condign punishment." It had to realize that there was no such thing as civil society between nations. Jackson was one of just ten Senators to vote for this measure. He joined a similar minority in calling for military support to American fur trappers and hunters in the Upper Missouri country, deep inside lands promised to several tribes.⁵⁸

In the nationalist ideal that Jackson represented, the state of nature from which peoples and nations had emerged was not the gentle garden that Jeffersonian reformers had tried to recreate. It had little to do with independence. Rather it was a violent and brutal place where only the strong survived. That was still the case whenever different nations came into conflict, no matter what the European law of nations said to the contrary. In valorizing the nation's right to vengeance—the ultimate

signifier of the savage instead of the civil state—Jackson thus offered a different way to recover the natural rights lost upon entry into a social contract. He and Overton made the point repeatedly and explicitly: the right to self-defense was “a *natural* right, anterior to the law of nations” that no treaty or custom could limit. Vengeance was self-defense within a savage world, rather than an attribute of savagery. And because no laws could protect them beyond their own borders, Americans had to make it known that “the avenging rod” would fall upon anyone who harmed a citizen. Instead of the nation’s borrowing power in the eyes of European creditors, then, this viewpoint focused on America’s ability to strike fear in the hearts of its most frightening foes.⁵⁹

None of this is to suggest that Jackson lacked populist instincts. His experiences during the War of 1812, especially, had convinced him that poor men were more likely to fight than rich ones. Inasmuch as they had helped annihilate the Creek Nation and deliver the Gulf Coast to the United States, his wartime volunteers deserved a piece of that soil. So did those squatters who left improvements on the land, for this was the best way to achieve the “grand policy” of uniting all the white settlements between the Atlantic and the Mississippi. The General was also troubled by outright corruption at any level of government, and therefore clashed with Overton in 1823 when the Judge and banker tried to pack a court with compliant and pro-speculator justices. After a few months of chilled relations, though, the two men were once again in close and friendly correspondence about both family and politics. In 1828, the Judge accompanied the General on the triumphal voyage from Nashville to Washington, where Jackson famously invited the unwashed masses to take over the White House with him.⁶⁰

The people and not the government, Jackson and his partisans always said, were “sovereign.” But sovereign in what capacity, and to what end? Not to interfere in contracts or delay payment to creditors, be they Americans or not. Not to pass stay, replevin, or minimum appraisal laws, nor to create public credit in order to satisfy private debts. Those ideas more or less died when the more democratic choice for national office buried them under the duty to contain government within constitutional boundaries. Nor did the people have leave to positively reshape society in order to promote “natural” equality. Both Jackson and most Jacksonians were hostile to any efforts to direct the social process, emphasizing instead the supremacy of individual choice and free competition. They were lukewarm to the new educational improvements of the 1830s and 1840s and fiercely opposed to any challenge to patriarchal authority. In Jacksonian America it was the more conservative party that would claim the mantle of reform, normally in terms of Christian morality rather than natural rights, while the more democratic one became the default choice of nationalism.⁶¹

Jacksonian sovereignty instead referred to the people’s natural right to pursue property however and *wherever* they chose, to traverse what would become an unbroken domain of white liberty and black slavery in search of fame, fortune, or independence. Jackson had developed this general idea during the 1800s and 1810s, when federally protected Indian territories had complicated his far-flung business ventures and enabled hostile warriors to terrify frontier populations. The solution was to realize an Indian-free world that would “give to our citizens perfect safety in passing through [the Gulf region].” It was to create a seamless geography within

which any “freeborn American” could seek farmland, sell produce, track down debtors, and otherwise live according to rules of exchange that were no longer in question. Jackson made it clear that they carried those rights as *citizens*—as national rather than natural beings—wherever their business took them, be it the Caribbean Sea or the Upper Missouri. Anyone who said otherwise would face the nation’s vengeance. By thus relocating the American nation within a (Hobbesian) state of nature, Jacksonian ideas assigned to it the sovereign power of vengeance and deprived natural rights of the social and economic relevance they had once carried. Taking land from natives became the state’s one and only means of encouraging independence.⁶²

As President, Jackson attracted a working majority of Americans who still identified independence as the basic goal of their labor. Urban artisans threatened by wage dependency, poor farmers hanging on to their freeholds, religious and ethnic minorities excluded from bourgeois respectability—all of them found in “the Old Hero” someone who would at least not grant their foes still more privileges. By his own terms he offered nothing more. “Distinctions in society will always exist under every just government,” he reported in his famous 1832 veto of the Second Bank of the United States. People were “equally entitled” to full protection of “the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue,” while no one, least of all the “foreigners” and “favored class of men” around the Bank, deserved special access to the “bounty of Government.” The people were sovereign in the face of the nation’s foes but largely powerless to address the “distinctions in society” that Jackson accepted as natural, much less to secure their independence against the legal entitlements of “superior industry, economy, and virtue.” When the next Panic came in 1837, it was not the Democrats but the Whigs—the revamped conservatives—who called for relief, which they now saw as a way to promote commercial order.⁶³

NOTES

- 1 “The Federalist No. 11,” in Joanne B. Freeman, *Alexander Hamilton: Writings* (New York, 2001), 208; “The Federalist No. 78,” in *ibid.*, 425, 422 and 424 (“independence” of courts). The classic formulation of Federalist political theory remains Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (1969; Chapel Hill, 1997), 471–564.
- 2 Andrew Jackson to Andrew J. Donelson, Feb. 8, 1823, in John Spencer Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (3 vols., 1928; Washington, DC, 1969), III, 186–87; Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson Donelson, July 25, 1822, in Harold D. Moser, David R. Hoth, and George H. Hoemann, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson* (Knoxville, 1996), V, 206 (“designing demagogues”), hereafter *Papers of AJ*; AJ to William Berkeley Lewis, July 16, 1820, in Moser, Hoth, and Hoemann, eds., *Papers of AJ* (Nashville, 1994), IV, 379 (“friends of the Bank”); AJ to James K. Polk, December [24?], 1826, in Herbert Weaver, ed., *Correspondence of James K. Polk* (9 vols., Nashville, 1969), I, 64 (“old republican”).
- 3 Alan Taylor, “‘A Kind of Warr’: The Contest for Land on the Northeastern Frontier, 1750–1820,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (Jan. 1989), 7 and 3–26 (hereafter WMQ); Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760–1820* (Chapel Hill, 1990); Terry Bouton, *Taming Democracy: The Founders, “The People,” and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution* (New York, 2007); James L. Huston, “The American Revolutionaries, The Political Economy of Aristocracy, and the American Concept of the Distribution of Wealth, 1760–1900” *American Historical*

- Review*, 98 (October 1993), 1079–1105; Wythe Holt, “The New Jerusalem: Herman Husband’s Egalitarian Alternative to the United States’ Constitution,” in Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael, eds., *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation* (New York, 2011), 253–72.
- 4 Tenants quoted in Alfred F. Young, *The Democratic-Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763–1797* (Chapel Hill, 1967), 534; play quoted in J.M. Opal, *Beyond the Farm: National Ambitions in Rural New England* (Philadelphia, 2008), 42; George Minot quoted in Gregory Nobles, “‘Satan, Smith, Shattuck, and Shays’: The Peoples’ Leaders in the Massachusetts Regulation of 1786,” in Young et al., eds., *Revolutionary Founders*, 219. See also Marjoleine Kars, *Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion* (Chapel Hill, 2002).
- 5 Allan Nevins, *The American States During and After the Revolution, 1775–1789* (New York, 1969), 385–86, 404–5, 456–57, 525–56; Young, *Democratic-Republicans of New York*, 212–13; Bouton, *Taming Democracy*; “Opinion of Judge Mills, in the Two Proceeding Cases,” in *Lapsley vs. Brashears and Barr*, 4 Litt. 47, Court of Appeals of Kentucky, October 11, 1823 catalogs post-war relief measures.
- 6 Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors*, 16–17; Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815–46* (New York, 1991), 3–33.
- 7 Young, *Democratic-Republicans of New York*, 235; John L. Brooke, “To the Quiet of the People: Revolutionary Settlements and Civil Unrest in Western Massachusetts, 1774–1789,” *WMQ*, 46 (July, 1989), 425–62; and Nobles, “‘Satan, Smith, Shattuck, and Shays,’” 215–32, esp. 223.
- 8 M.M. Goldsmith, “Regulating Anew the Moral and Political Sentiments of Mankind: Bernard Mandeville and the Scottish Enlightenment,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49 (October–December 1988), 587–606; Ralph Lerner, “Commerce and Character: The Anglo-American as New-Model Man,” *WMQ*, 36 (January 1979), 3–26.
- 9 Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767; Edinburgh, 1966), 155.
- 10 Henry Homes, Lord Kames, *Historical Law Tracts* (Edinburgh, 1761), 35.
- 11 David M. Fitzsimmons, “Tom Paine’s New World Order: Idealistic Internationalism in the Ideology of Early American Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 19 (Sept. 1995), 569–82; J.M. Opal, “The Labors of Liberality: Christian Benevolence and National Prejudice in the American Founding,” *Journal of American History*, 94 (March 2008), 1082–1107 (hereafter *JAH*).
- 12 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), Book V, chapter iii (“regularly employed” and “faith of contracts”); Book V, chapter cxi (“industrious and frugal”); Book II, chapter ii (“such violent injustice”); Book IV, chapter vii (Spain and Portugal).
- 13 “The Federalist No. 7,” in Freeman, ed., *Alexander Hamilton*, 188; “Objections and Answers respecting the Administration of the Government,” Alexander Hamilton to George Washington, Aug. 18, 1792, in *ibid.*, 774–75; Woody Holton, “‘From the Labours of Others’: The War Bonds Controversy and the Origins of the Constitution in New England,” *WMQ*, 61 (April, 2004), 271–316. Hamilton directly cited Smith in the 1792 letter to Washington and routinely paraphrased the text in his 1790 reports on public credit. See Forrest McDonald, *Alexander Hamilton: A Biography* (New York, 1979), 233–36.
- 14 For relevant (and competing) discussions of Federalist thought and policy, see Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early American Republic, 1789–1815* (New York, 2009), 95–139; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity* (Chapel Hill, 2010), 88–135; Max Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State* (New York, 2008); Bouton, *Taming Democracy*; Woody Holton, “Did Democracy Cause the Recession that led to the Constitution?” *JAH*, 92 (Sept. 2005), 442–69.

- 15 Opal, *Beyond the Farm*, 55–56, 57, 63, 50–55 and 96–125.
- 16 Robert Green McCloskey, “Introduction” in McCloskey, ed., *The Works of James Wilson* (2 vols., Cambridge, MA, 1967), I, 1–48; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 411–12, 451–52.
- 17 James Wilson, “Of the Study of Law in the United States,” [1790], in McCloskey, ed., *Works of James Wilson*, I, 92 (“great commonwealth”), 86 (“scaffolding”); Wilson, “Of the Law of Nations,” [1790?], in *ibid.*, I, 153. The case in question was *Ware vs. Hylton*; see McCloskey, “Introduction,” 31–32.
- 18 McCloskey, “Introduction,” 22, 43–45; Bouton, *Taming Democracy*, 134–35.
- 19 Matthew Rainbow Hale, “On Their Tiptoes: Political Time and Newspapers during the Advent of the Radicalized French Revolution, circa 1792–1793,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 29 (Summer 2009), 191–218; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 174–208.
- 20 Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York 1984); Andrew Shankman, *Crucible of American Democracy: The Struggle to Fuse Egalitarianism and Capitalism in Jeffersonian Pennsylvania* (Lawrence, KS, 2004); Alan Taylor, “The Plough-Jogger: Jedidiah Peck and the Democratic Revolution,” in Young et al., eds., *Revolutionary Founders*, 375–87.
- 21 Jefferson, “Summary View of the Rights of British America,” [1775] in Adrienne Koch and William Peden, eds., *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (1944; New York, 2004), 288; Jefferson, “Autobiography,” [1821], in *ibid.*, 50, 38; Jefferson, “To Mssrs. Nehemiah Dodge et als.,” [1802], in *ibid.*, 307 (emphasis added); Holly Brewer, “Entailing Aristocracy in Colonial Virginia: ‘Ancient Feudal Restraints’ and Revolutionary Reform,” *WMQ*, 54 (April 1997), 307–46. Relevant studies of Jefferson include Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography* (New York, 1975), 97–158; Peter Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire: The Language of American Nationalism* (Charlottesville, 2000); Johann N. Neem, “Developing Freedom: Thomas Jefferson, The State, and Human Capability,” *Studies in American Political Development*, forthcoming. For Jefferson’s views on the repayment of debts, see Brian Steele, *Thomas Jefferson and American Nationhood* (New York, 2012), 115 and 115n.
- 22 Robert Coram, *Political Inquiries; To Which is Added, a Plan for the General Establishment of Schools throughout the United States* (Wilmington, 1791), 104, viii, 22, 56–57; Seth Cotlar, “‘Every Man Should Have Property’: Robert Coram and the American Revolution’s Legacy of Economic Populism,” in Young et al., eds., *Revolutionary Founders*, 337–53 and Cotlar, *Tom Paine’s America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville, 2011), 115–60.
- 23 Cotlar, “Every Man Should Have Property,” 349–53; Carl F. Caestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York, 1983), 3–12; Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783–1876* (New York, 1980), 133–42.
- 24 *Albany Register*, Jan. 16, 1810; *Albany Register*, Feb. 12, 1805 (“poor boy”); Young, *Democratic-Republicans of New York*, 518 (“spirit of reformation”) and 518–45; Tunis Wortman, *An Oration on the Influence of Social Institutions Upon Human Morals and Happiness* (New York, 1796), 6, 26, 18, 26 (“liberal and benevolent”), 4.
- 25 Phineas Hedges, *An Oration Delivered before the Republican Society of Ulster County and Other Citizens* (Goshen, N.Y., 1795), 16; Cotlar, *Tom Paine’s America*, 115–60.
- 26 Hedges, *Oration Delivered before the Republican Society*, 3, 7; Wortman, *Oration on the Influence of Social Institutions*, 29; Young, *Democratic-Republicans of New York*, 232–43; Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors*, 220–32.
- 27 Thomas Jefferson to Meriwether Lewis, Aug. 21, 1808, in Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States: Territory of Louisiana-Missouri, 1806–1814* (Washington, 1949), XIV, 220; Joyce Appleby, “Commercial Farming and the ‘Agrarian Myth’ in the Early Republic,” *JAH* 68 (March 1982), 847 and 833–849; Wood, *Empire of*

- Liberty*, 357–99. The 160-acre rule in the 1804 Land Act does not appear to have encouraged small-scale purchases to actual settlers as much as radical Jeffersonians had hoped. See Forrest McDonald, *The Presidency of Thomas Jefferson* (Wichita, 1976), 172n.
- 28 Jefferson, “Autobiography,” in Koch and Peden, eds., *Life and Selected Writings*, 49; Cotlar, “Every Man Should Have Property,” 349–53; Young, *Democratic-Republicans of New York*, 524–25; Dell Upton, “Another City: The Urban Cultural Landscape in the Early Republic,” in Catherine Hutchins, ed., *Everyday Life in the Early Republic* (Winterthur, DE, 1994), 61–117.
- 29 Taylor, “The Plough-Jogger”; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 430–31.
- 30 Cotlar, “Everyman Should Have Property,” 348; Claire Priest, “Law and Commerce, 1580–1815,” in Michael Grossberg and Christopher Tomlins, eds., *The Cambridge History of Law in America* (2 vols., New York, 2008), I, 400–46; and Bruce H. Mann, “The Transformation of Law and Economy in Early America,” in *ibid.*, I, 365–99.
- 31 *National Intelligencer* as reproduced in *Sampson Against the Philistines, Or, the Reformation of Lawsuits and Justice Made Cheap, Speedy, and Brought Home to Every Man’s Door* (Philadelphia, 1804), appendix; “An Act to Regulate Arbitrations and Proceedings in Courts of Justice,” *Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1806). The best overall study of Jeffersonian Pennsylvania is Shankman, *Crucible of American Democracy*.
- 32 Steele, *Thomas Jefferson and American Nationhood*; Nicole Eustace, 1812: *War and the Passions of Patriotism* (Philadelphia, 2012).
- 33 Murray N. Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819: Reactions and Policies* (New York, 1962), 1–23; William M. Gouge, *A Short History of Paper Money and Banking in the United States*, ed. Joseph Dorfman (1833; New York, 1968), 133–39; Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 163–64.
- 34 AJ to James Gadsden, Aug. 1, 1819, in Moser et al., eds., *Papers of AJ*, IV, 307–8; Patrick Bolton and Howard Rosenthal, “Political Intervention in Debt Contracts,” *Journal of Political Economy* 110 (Oct. 2002), 1106 (cotton prices); Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 163–71; and Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: From Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York, 2005), 181–217.
- 35 Monroe quoted in Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819*, 25; Thomas Hart Benton, *Thirty Years’ View: Or, a History of the Working of the American Government for Thirty Years, from 1820 to 1850* (2 vols., New York, 1872), I, 12.
- 36 Benton, *Thirty Years’ View*, I, 6, 5; Rothbard, *Panic of 1819*, 34–55.
- 37 Rothbard, *Panic of 1819*, 37–38.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 42–43; Gov. Adair quoted in William G. Leger, “The Administration of John Adair,” (M.A. Thesis, University of Kentucky, 1951), 23 and 21–35; Entries for Dec. 8, 1818, Jan. 18, 1819, Jan. 22, 1819, and Jan. 26, 1819, *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Kentucky* (Frankfort, 1819), 16–18, 175, 190–95, and 218–19; *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), Nov. 6, 1823.
- 39 “Common Sense,” *Nashville Whig*, May 29, 1821; Speech by Lt. Governor Gabriel Slaughter, Dec. 8, 1818, *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Kentucky* (Frankfort, 1819), 18–19 (“superintending authority”); proposed laws Jan. 18, Jan. 22, and Jan. 26, 1819, in *ibid.*, 179, 190–95, 218–19.
- 40 Henry Clay to Langdon Cheves, Nov. 14, 1819, in James F. Hopkins, ed., *The Papers of Henry Clay* (10 vols., Lexington, 1961), II, 722; Clay to Cheves, Nov. 20, 1820, in *ibid.*, II, 903. The total number of votes cast for state representative in Davidson County jumped from 2,179 in 1817 to 3,082 in 1819. That year, Felix Grundy narrowly lost out in a three-way race; in 1820, he defeated the anti-relief leader Thomas Williamson, 883 to 644. The Panic played havoc with county politics all over Tennessee, sometimes multiplying the number of candidates and sometimes consolidating a single leader’s hold on power. In 1820, the state held seven special elections, five for State Senate and two for State House

- of Representatives. See *A New Nation Votes: American Election Returns, 1787–1825*, http://dl.tufts.edu/about/a_new_nation_votes (accessed April 3, 2013).
- 41 Clay to Cheeves, Nov. 14, 1819, in Hopkins, ed., *Papers of Henry Clay*, II, 722 (Clay referred specifically to threats to the Bank of the United States); “Tennessee Bank and Relief Law,” *Niles Weekly Register*, Sept. 2, 1820 (full text of June 22, 1820 motion by Andrew Jackson, Edward Ward et al., including call for “industry and simplicity”). For examples of anti-relief rhetoric, see “The Bank of the State of Tennessee, No. 1,” *Nashville Gazette*, Sept. 16, 1820; “The Bank of the State of Tennessee, No. 2,” *Nashville Gazette*, Sept. 23, 1820. For background in Tennessee politics, see Charles G. Sellers, Jr., “Banking and Politics in Jackson’s Tennessee, 1817–27,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 41, 1 (June 1954), 61–84. This otherwise excellent article mischaracterizes Jackson’s July 16, 1820 letter to William Lewis as an attack on all banks, when in fact Jackson assails the new public bank (the “loan office,” in his words) while giving advice to the “friends of the [Nashville] Bank.” The fact that he expressed discomfort with all kinds of bank strikes me as less important than his repeated and explicit attacks on the new *state* banks alongside his close friendship with the major banking figures of central Tennessee.
- 42 “Opinion of Judge Mills, in the Two Proceeding Cases,” in *Lapsley vs. Brashears and Barr*, 4 Litt. 47, Court of Appeals of Kentucky, October 11, 1823. Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 163–64 astutely notes that the courts never challenged the “patently illegal” practice of the private banks suspending their specie payments.
- 43 Blair, Ingles, and Barr vs. Williams, 4 Litt. 34, Court of Appeals of Kentucky, October 8, 1823 (“strict justice” and “bands of civil society”); *Lapsley vs. Brashears and Barr*, 4 Litt. 47, Court of Appeals of Kentucky, October 11, 1823 (“welfare of the community” and “international law”); John Boyle, William Owsley, and B[enjamin] Mills to Honorable Representatives, December 9, 1824, in *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Kentucky* (Frankfort, 1824). Legislatures in Georgia, New Hampshire, and elsewhere sometimes removed particular judges or even abolished courts they found objectionable. See John Phillip Reid, *Legislating the Courts: Judicial Dependence in Early National New Hampshire* (DeKalb, IL, 2009), 110–21.
- 44 *Providence Gazette*, “By the Mails,” Aug. 17, 1822, reprinted this praise of Ohio from a Kentucky paper, where it was originally titled, “Manufactures of Ohio.” It subsequently appeared in *Boston Weekly Messenger*, Aug. 22, 1822 and *Berks and Schuylkill Journal* (Reading, PA), Aug. 24, 1822. See also *Richmond Enquirer*, “The Times,” Jan. 6, 1821, which argues that the “misplaced kindness” of the stay laws were “warring with the very elements of the social convention.” For evidence that the relief laws had a net positive effect on the economy, see Bolton and Rosenthal, “Political Intervention in Debt Contracts,” 1103–34.
- 45 “Tennessee Bank and Relief Law,” *Niles Weekly Register*, Sept. 2, 1820; Moser et al., eds. *Papers of AJ*, IV, 377n; “Receipt for Fifty Shares of Bank Stock,” Oct. 24, 1808, in *ibid.*, II, 200.
- 46 AJ to Andrew Jackson Donelson, Feb. 8, 1823, in Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of AJ*, III, 186–87; Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson Donelson, July 25, 1822, in Moser et al., eds., *Papers of AJ*, V, 206; Jackson quoted in St. George Leakin Sioussat, “Some Phases of Tennessee Politics in the Jacksonian Period,” *American Historical Review* 14, 1 (Oct. 1908), 61 (“as long as I live”). The most comprehensive biographies of Jackson remain those of Robert Remini. See especially *Andrew Jackson* (New York, 1966) and *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire, 1767–1821* (Baltimore, 1977).
- 47 Thomas P. Abernathy, “The Early Development of Commerce and Banking in Tennessee,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 14 (Dec. 1927), 311–25; Andrew R.L. Cayton, “When Shall We Cease to Have Judases?: The Blount Conspiracy and the Limits of

- the ‘Extended Republic,’” in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Launching the ‘Extended Republic’: The Federalist Era* (Charlottesville, 1996), 156–89.
- 48 AJ to Francis Smith, March 29, 1817, in Moser et al., eds., *Papers of AJ*, IV, 105; AJ to John Coffee, Dec. 26, 1816, in *ibid*, IV, 77; Daniel Parker to AJ, Feb. 10, 1817, in *ibid*, IV, 90; “Receipt for Fifty Shares of Bank Stock,” Oct. 24, 1808, in Harold D. Moser and Sharon McPherson, eds., *Papers of AJ* (Knoxville, 1984), II, 200. On Overton, see Box 3, John Overton Papers, 1766–1833, Murdock Collection, 1780–1851, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville and J.C. McDavitt, *A Brief Sketch of the Overton Family and the John Rice Grant* (Memphis, p.p., 1904).
- 49 AJ and John Hutchings to George Bullitt, August 6, 1808, in Moser and McPherson, eds., *Papers of AJ*, II, 199; AJ to William Berkeley Lewis, July 16, 1820, in Moser et al., eds., *Papers of AJ*, IV, 378–79; [Overton], “Reception of General Jackson,” *Nashville Gazette*, April 22, 1825; [Benjamin Mills], “Opinion of Judge Mills, in the Two Proceeding Cases,” in *Lapsley vs. Brashears and Barr*, 4 Litt. 47, Court of Appeals of Kentucky, October 11, 1823 (the other case referred to was *Blair*).
- 50 Competing interpretations of Jacksonian politics include Sellers, *The Market Revolution* and Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, on one hand, versus Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–48* (New York, 2007) on the other.
- 51 Rep. Hopkinson quoted in Thomas Hart Benson, *Abridgement of the Debates of Congress, From 1789 to 1856* (New York, 1858), VI, 290 (“civilized nations”); Rep. Smith in “Debate on the Seminole War, Part Six,” *Niles’ Weekly Register*, Feb. 20, 1819 (“great avenger”); Eustace, 1812, 228–34.
- 52 AJ to the Second Division, March 7, 1812, in Moser and McPherson, eds., *Papers of AJ*, II, 290; AJ to Willie Blount, June 5, 1812, in *ibid*, II, 301–2; AJ to Second Division, July 9, 1812, in *ibid*, II, 313–14. The most influential early biography of Jackson was John Eaton, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (1817), and its most republished component was the last chapter, about Jackson’s person and personality. For contemporary reviews see “General Jackson,” *The Weekly Recorder* (Chillicote, OH), Sept. 18, 1817 and “Literary: Life of Jackson,” *The American Star*, July 16, 1817. I am grateful to Katherine Wilson for detailing the range and pace of these publications.
- 53 *Frankfort Argus and Western Reporter*, “Abridged from *The Telegraph*,” July 14, 1824. In a series of articles under the name “Patrick Henry,” a Relief Party supporter attacked the “Court Party” as latter-day Federalists and traitors. Besides *Niles Weekly Register*, which published Jackson’s June 1820 rant against relief, the only direct mention of the General’s fierce opposition to relief that I have found is *Alexandria Gazette*, April 27, 1827, which notes the NWR article.
- 54 John J. Crittenden to Henry Clay, April 27, 1826, in Hopkins, ed., *Papers of Henry Clay*, V, 278–79; R[obert] Wickliffe to Clay, Sept. 13, 1826, in *ibid*, V, 685. For early efforts to abolish debt imprisonment, see Leger, “Administration of John Adair,” 36–42 and remarks of Senator [Richard] Johnson, “Imprisonment for Debt,” Register of Senate Debates, 18th Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 224–26, in *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774–1875* at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lawhome.html> (accessed April 25, 2013). For anti-relief support for abolishing debt imprisonment, see “On Imprisonment for Debt, from the *St. Genevieve* (Mo.) *Correspondent*,” *Palladium of Liberty* (Morristown, NJ), Dec. 19, 1822.
- 55 Jonathan Roberts and Philip S. Klein, “Memoirs of a Senator from Pennsylvania: Jonathan Roberts, 1771–1854,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 62 (April 1938), 222; Roberts and Klein, “Memoirs of a Senator from Pennsylvania,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 62 (July 1938), 408.

- 56 1822 commendation in Robert E. Corlew, *Tennessee: A Short History* (2nd edition, Knoxville, 1981), 170; [Overton], "Reception of General Jackson," *Nashville Gazette*, April 22, 1825; AJ to James K. Polk, December [24?], 1826, in Weaver, ed., *Correspondence of James Polk*, I, 64; "Jackson's Recorded Votes in the United States Senate, 1823–25," in Moser et al., eds., *Papers of AJ*, V, 463–67; For Jackson's makeover, see Henry Clay to Benjamin W. Leigh, Oct. 20, 1823, in Hopkins, ed., *Papers of Henry Clay*, III, 501. In January 1825, the Senate voted on a bill that would have prevented creditors from holding debtors in jail unless they testified both to an outstanding debt and to the fear that the debtor was about to leave the state. Even its foes noted that this did not amount to the "abolition" of debt imprisonment, and that only a fraction of the nation's debtors would be affected by the change to U.S. courts. The Senate being the Senate, however, even this bill failed. The tally was 20–23. Jackson voted with the 20, which came from the unanimous (both Senators) support of Tennessee, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, and (interestingly) Pennsylvania. Mississippi and Alabama also gave their support, as did single Senators from Missouri, Indiana, Illinois, Virginia, Georgia, Massachusetts, Maryland, and New York. The votes did not clearly anticipate support for Jackson; six of the twenty were later Adams or Clay supporters. Of the 23 opposed, solid (two Senator) votes came from New Hampshire, Vermont, Delaware, South Carolina, Ohio, and Rhode Island, with single votes from all over the union. Some thirteen of the no votes were future Adams supporters. See "Imprisonment for Debt," Register of Senate Debates, 18th Congress, 2nd Session, p. 230, in *A Century of Lawmaking*, at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lawhome.html> (accessed April 24, 2013) and Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774–Present, at <http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp> (accessed April 25, 2013).
- 57 David Porter, *An Exposition of the Facts and Circumstances, Which Justified the Expedition to Foxardo, and the Consequences Thereof* (Washington, DC, 1825), 16, 67, 59, and 58–62.
- 58 Philip Barbour quoted in Thomas Hart Benton, *An Abridgment of the Debates of Congress, from 1789 to 1856* (16 vols., New York, 1857–61), VIII, 124, 114; see also the remarks of Senators Lloyd and Mills, *ibid*, VIII, 136–38. In March 1824, Senator Thomas Hart Benton proposed military protections to Upper Missouri traders—and was rebuked by a solid majority of Senators who saw no call to send troops into what they considered foreign lands. See "Indian Fur Trade," *Annals of the 18th Congress*, 1st Session, pp. 432–60 and 507, in *A Century of Lawmaking*, at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lawhome.html> (accessed April 25, 2013).
- 59 [John Overton], *A Vindication of the Measures of the President and His Commanding Generals, in the Commencement and Termination of the Seminole War, By a Citizen of Tennessee* (Nashville, 1818?), 21, 21n; AJ to the United States Troops near Suwannee River, April 15, 1818, in Moser et al., eds., *Papers of AJ*, IV, 192. Here and elsewhere Jackson insisted that no harm should come to women and children among native enemies.
- 60 Andrew Jackson to John Williams, May 18, 1814, in Harold D. Moser, David R. Hoth, Sharon McPherson, and John H. Reinbold, eds., *Papers of AJ* (Knoxville, 1991), III, 74. For his brief feud but enduring friendship with Overton, see AJ to John Coffee, April 15, 1823, in Moser et al., eds., *Papers of AJ*, V, 270–1; AJ to Coffee, Aug. 15, 1823 in *ibid*, V, 289–90; AJ to John Overton, Dec. 5, 1823, in *ibid*, V, 321 (in which AJ sounds out Overton about accepting a possible new judgeship for Alabama and Mississippi); and AJ to Overton, Dec. 19, 1824, in *ibid*, V, 455.
- 61 The literature on the political culture of Jacksonian America is vast. I am most indebted to Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*; Sellers, *The Market Revolution*; Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*; Mary Hersherberger, "Mobilizing Women,

Anticipating Abolition: The Struggle against Indian Removal in the 1830s,” *JAH*, 86 (June 1999), 15–40; and Daniel Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815 to 1840* (Baltimore, 1995).

- 62 AJ to John Williams, May 18, 1814, in Moser et al., eds. *Papers of AJ*, III, 75; J.M. Opal, “General Jackson’s Passports: Natural Rights and Sovereign Citizens in the Political Thought of Andrew Jackson, 1780s–1820s,” *Studies in American Political Development*, 27 (October 2013), 69–85.
- 63 “President Jackson’s Veto Message Regarding the Bank of the United States,” July 10, 1832, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/ajveto01.asp (accessed April 3, 2013). For responses to the 1837 Panic, see Michael F. Holt, *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln* (Baton Rouge, 1992), 152–68; Edward S. Balleisen, *Navigating Failure: Bankruptcy and Commercial Society in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill, 2001); Jessica Lepler, *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Crisis* (forthcoming).

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

LAND CONFLICT AND
LAND POLICY IN THE
UNITED STATES, 1785-1841



Reeve Huston

In April of 1785, Ensign John Armstrong led a company of soldiers across the Ohio River. What he experienced there shocked him. "If the honorable Congress do not fall on some speedy method to prevent people from settling on the lands of the United States west of the Ohio," he wrote to the Commissioner of Public Lands, "that country will soon be inhabited by a banditti whose actions are a disgrace to human nature." These "banditti" were squatters settling illegally on unsurveyed federal land west of the Ohio. At Hockhocking and Muskingum there were already more than six hundred families; another fifteen hundred were scattered along the Miami and Scioto rivers. More were coming every day. Even though he had posted notices to stay away from the western shore, settlers were crossing the Ohio "by forties and fifties."

Armstrong and his company visited each settlement and ordered the inhabitants to leave. Sometimes they burned the squatters' homes; at other times they extracted a promise to leave in a few days. Most squatters complied with their orders, but occasionally Armstrong met with open resistance. A man named Ross denied that Congress had ordered settlers off these lands; in any case, he did not "care from whom [the orders] came, for he was determined to hold possession, and if I destroyed his house he would build six more within a week." When Ross began insulting Congress, the commissioners of Public Lands and Indian Affairs, and Armstrong himself, Armstrong had him arrested. Twice, the company was met by parties of armed men; but once they saw that Armstrong's orders were authentic, they agreed to leave. This was only a tactical retreat. After Armstrong's company left, most of the settlers returned and rebuilt. By June, even more families were squatting west of the Ohio.¹

Armstrong's experience along the Ohio highlights a central problem in the history of American land policy: settlers did not agree with their government over how land ought to be distributed, and by sheer numbers they overwhelmed it. Federal officials and western settlers also fought over whether white people were obliged to respect Indian sovereignty over land. Such conflicts were ubiquitous in the early American republic. They took place on several levels. They were practical conflicts, over who would get access to frontier lands, and by what rules. They were clashes over race

and American foreign relations. They were confrontations of social visions as well. Squatters had their own ideas about the moral basis of property rights and their own practices for establishing claims to property. Except when confronted with the armed power of the government or faced with the permanent loss of their property, they followed their own practices. These were conflicts between citizen and state, white and Indian, poor and wealthy, settler and large landowner.

Not all squatters were the same, however. The belligerent Mr. Ross was not a mere homesteader: "most of the settlers at this place were tenants" under him. Between independence and the adoption of the Federal Constitution, settlers, speculators, states, and the federal government all sought to gain control over Indian lands. Each claimed land by coercing, cheating, or negotiating with Indians, drawing up counterfeit Indian cessions, or claiming land by right of sovereignty. Ross had probably acquired a title by one of these methods, or bought it from someone who had. He settled west of the Ohio in order to establish himself as a landlord and proprietor, and each tenant who settled under his title helped bolster his claim. Many squatters, however, rejected Ross's methods and aspirations; they insisted that "white people are at liberty to settle where they please," undeterred by the claims of government, Indians, or great proprietors. "Squatter" was a capacious category, containing contradictory practices and norms concerning the conversion of collectively held land into private property.²

The conflict and collaboration among squatters, speculators, and the federal government was shaped by and, in turn, shaped the broader political and social order. Marked by frequent intensive interaction between citizens, local leaders, and the state, it tied together in alternating conflict and collaboration local mobilizations, civic culture, and government. In doing so, it decisively shaped federal land and Indian policy. It exerted a powerful influence over territorial and national politics. It helped shape the emerging American state and its relationship to its citizens. It influenced the path of economic development that the United States followed during its first seventy years of existence.

Clashes over the distribution and ownership of federal lands were part of a larger pattern of agrarian conflict in the early republic. The Revolutionary era and its aftermath witnessed over a score of back-country conflicts, in which settlers and great proprietors struggled for control of the land. Between the 1830s and 1880s, conflicts erupted in New York, Iowa, Kansas, California, New Mexico, and elsewhere between tenants and squatters, on the one hand, and landlords, land companies, canal companies, and railroads, on the other. Some of these conflicts were gargantuan: between 25,000 and 60,000 tenants participated in the New York Anti-Rent Wars of the 1840s, providing the swing votes that determined elections in New York for two years. In the 1840s and 1850s, a loose coalition of insurgent farmers, labor activists, and middle-class reformers campaigned for modern land reform.³ Taken together, these conflicts amounted to a major, ongoing controversy in the early republic. The land question did not generate the debate, the violence, or the number of combatants that the controversy over slavery did. But it was a major, national conflict, one whose failure to ignite pervasive violence was due largely to agrarians' success in winning concessions from the federal government.

That agrarian conflict was central to social and political development in the early republic is hardly a novel claim. Writing between the 1940s and the 1960s, Progressive

historians like Paul Wallace Gates, Roy Robbins, and Henry Christman uncovered a multitude of battles over land, depicting them as social and political conflicts between democratic, egalitarian settlers and anti-democratic landlords, speculators, and railroads.⁴ This view came under withering attack during the 1960s and 1970s. Revisionists like Robert Swierenga, Allan Bogue, and Sung Bok Kim rejected the Progressive historians' Manichean opposition between democratic settlers and elitist land monopolists. With deep research and careful analysis, they swept away several of their predecessors' poorly supported generalizations: that settlers did not speculate in land; that speculators were always hated outsiders in the western settlements; that land speculation led to extensive farm tenancy. But in heaving the bath water out of the window, they let the baby slip as well. Revisionists denied that agrarian conflicts involved conflicts over values, social visions, or policy choices. Squatters and agrarian rebels, they argued, were a striving *petit bourgeoisie*, whose economic values and practices were identical to those of the speculators they battled. These arguments added up to a bold dismissal of agrarian conflict. The revisionists suggested that there was no meaningful social conflict over land, no clash of competing social visions—only a crass, middle-class scramble for wealth.⁵ These conclusions flew in the face of all the available evidence about illegal settlers' and insurgents' thinking, and proceeded from a fundamental misreading of their actions. Missing the distinct norms and rules that squatters developed concerning the buying and selling of claims to real estate, they interpreted any buying or selling of those claims—and sometimes simply a desire to own land—as “speculation” and middle-class striving. In addition, revisionists and progressives alike saw agrarian conflict and land policy as clashes between white people. Indians, Mexicans, and racial conflict over land did not enter into their stories. Despite these shortcomings, the revisionist argument became the dominant one, and subsequent historians took to heart their claims about the cultural and political meaninglessness of agrarian conflict. After the mid-1970s, scholars stopped writing about the subject.

Until the 1990s, that is. The last two decades have witnessed a modest revival in studies of agrarian conflict. Using the preoccupations and methods of the (now quite old) new social history, a large handful of historians have once again begun to take seriously conflicts over land and the ideas, alliances, and political outcomes they generated. At its best, the new work substitutes the moralistic and binary class analysis of the Progressives with a nuanced attention to ambiguity, contradiction, and gradations of difference. Many practitioners follow the example of the historian E.P. Thompson, seeking to understand agrarian conflict as a product of social experience, social relationships, and cultural traditions.⁶ With this approach, these scholars have begun to understand squatters' and agrarian rebels' ideas and actions on their own terms. By doing so, they have revived the idea that conflicts over land were genuine social, political, and ideological conflicts. At the same time, another overlapping body of scholarship has uncovered the fierce conflicts over land that occurred between these same squatters, speculators, great proprietors, and federal officials, on the one hand, and American Indians, on the other. Taken together, these two bodies of work offer a rich understanding of the politics of land in the early American republic.⁷

The new literature on agrarian conflict is largely limited to privately held lands. The most extensive arena for conflicts over access to the soil, however, was the

western lands held by Indians or the federal government. Building on the insights of the newer work on agrarian conflict, this chapter offers a preliminary synthesis and reinterpretation of the extensive literature on the public lands and on US land policy from the 1780s to 1841, when squatter preemption became the law of the land. I hope that this chapter will soon be superseded. For historians interested in social conflict, grass-roots politics, and socially and institutionally embedded policy formation, the contest for the public lands of the United States remains a fruitful and understudied topic, crying out for further research.

Indian and federal lands were, like privately claimed lands, sites of fierce conflict between Indians and whites and among squatters, speculators, and federal officials. These conflicts gave expression to clashing interests, social visions, and blueprints for western development. But the scramble for land gave rise to collaboration as well as conflict. Squatters were not a monolithic group. Their ideas about property and its distribution differed from those of most speculators or public officers, but they also diverged within the group. Individuals and groups of squatters sometimes violated their fellows' ideals when doing so offered practical advantages. This alternation between conflict and collaboration shaped federal politics and policy. Opportunism and ideals, conflict and collaboration created an ever-shifting, dynamic crucible in which American land policy was forged.

The best way to start is to ask: what was at stake in John Armstrong's confrontations with squatters along the Ohio? Squatters venerated fee-simple property in land, and they sought such ownership of frontier lands. Unlike eastern elites, however, they regarded it as the *goal*, rather than a *prerequisite* for settlement. Frontier settlers were notoriously cash-poor; most arrived at their new homes without sufficient funds to buy land. One way to gain title before 1788 was to settle under one of the many titles to frontier land claimed by speculators, or companies of adventurers. The undertaking was risky, as the titles' legal validity was questionable. On the other hand, it was a way to get land for little or no money: would-be proprietors needed settlers to establish their titles on the ground, so they offered special deals to those who would settle under their title.⁸

Other squatters settled without legal title, establishing their claim through occupancy and improvement. Squatters from Maine to California believed that resources like game, fish, and timber on unimproved land (that is, land not transformed by human labor) were free for the taking, and they made their living by doing so. They used these resources to make improvements, such as cleared land, fences, and buildings. These improvements were the property of the man who made them—or, if the maker was female or underage, of her husband or father. Often a squatter would move on without buying title to the land. When they did so, they sold their improvements to the next settler (or to a speculator). Most, and perhaps all, squatters insisted that a family could not be forced off of a plot that they occupied and had improved; they had the first claim to that land. Violation of these norms risked a violent response at the hands of neighbors.⁹

Though their everyday practices seem to have been identical across space, the ways in which squatters *justified* their right to land varied a great deal. Perhaps because they saw no chance of winning support from great proprietors, anti-proprietor movements often adopted radical visions of property rights. In August 1801, settlers

in the Sheepscot backcountry of Maine claimed the land on which they farmed by natural right, military service, and improving occupation:

We fought for land and liberty and it is hard if we can't enjoy either. . . . Who can have a better right to the land than we who have fought for it, subdued it and made it valuable. . . . God gave the earth to the children. We own no other proprietor. Wild lands ought to be as free as common air. . . .¹⁰

Squatters on federal and Indian lands, on the other hand, avoided open rejection of legal rules regulating property—most likely because they needed to cultivate the support of federal officials. The unauthorized settlers whom John Armstrong sought to dislodge from the west bank of the Ohio river proclaimed that “we have nothing more at hart [sic] than the Safety and happiness of the Common wealth” and, despite their open violation of Congressional law, declared that they were “unwilling to Act any thing . . . without the Consent and Advice of the Legislature.” They laid claim to the land not by natural right, but through their need and their service to the nation. Having faced a “cruel and savage enemy” during the Revolution, they were “Reduced almost to the Lowest Ebb of Poverty” at war’s end. They sought to relieve their poverty by settling on the “Vacant Lands” they saw all around them, “fully Determined to Comply with Every Requisition of the Legislature.” They asked that Congress grant them “Liberty: to Rest where we are” and to grant them the right of preemption—the exclusive right to buy the land on which they had settled. Other petitions from squatters on federal lands struck a similar tone and made their arguments in terms of need and public service, rather than on the basis of natural rights. Almost all of them asked for preemption.¹¹

Despite their ideological moderation, illegal settlers on federal and Indian lands were as hostile to great proprietors as any rebel on privately held land. At heart, their conflict with the government was over who should gain access to the land—farmer-settlers or speculators and great proprietors. The Ohio petitioners request for “the preference to our Actual Settlements” aimed primarily at preventing speculators from buying their claims. Similarly, settlers along the Scioto River complained that the lot sizes prescribed by the Ordinance of 1785, which provided that the public lands be sold in lots of 640 and 23,040 acres, were “too large for us to purchase.” They asked that the lands in their area be sold in tracts of 160 and 640 acres, and that they “may be sold to none but those who will become actual settlers thereon.”¹² Squatters sought direct access to cheap soil, in opposition to speculators’ and great proprietors’ efforts to monopolize frontier lands.

If agrarian conflict involved a contest between classes (or between class-based social visions), it also entailed racial strife. Across the western frontier of the early republic, whites settled on Indian land, claiming it as their own. Embittered by memories of brutal frontier warfare during the American Revolution, they depicted all Indians as irreclaimable “savages” and initiated a war of extirpation against them. It mattered not whether the Indians in question were Christians or heathen, allies or enemies of the United States, on a peace or war footing; frontier whites saw them all as enemies. Once they squatted on Indian land, a cycle of violence commenced: theft, assault, murder, revenge killings, and low-level warfare dominated Indian-white relations. To my knowledge, no historian has yet reconstructed the racial ideology

of frontier squatters; we do not know what qualities they imputed to Indians beyond an inescapable savagery, and we have not discerned their justification for taking Indian land. Squatter racism is a topic calling out for study; it provides an opportunity to explore popular racism and its relationship to popular egalitarianism, popular economic struggles, and day-to-day race relations.¹³

Federal officials and policy makers, almost all of whom were Federalist in sentiment before 1801, viewed squatters as the vanguard of a western dystopia. These men sought to consolidate the US government's control over its western territories by populating it with loyal, law-abiding citizens. Those lands, they hoped, would become a source of both revenue and political support for the federal government. At the local level, they wished to see an untamed frontier give way to orderly, hierarchical communities. The order they envisioned included deference to superiors; Federalists insisted that western settlers (and, indeed, all citizens) submit to the law and to the social superiors who administered it. It also included respect for private property. Like squatters, federal officials wished to convert the commonly held property in those territories—as well as communally owned Indian land that would later be acquired—into private property. But they rejected illegal settlers' belief that property could be obtained through labor and occupancy. Property derived from state sovereignty; it could be procured only through official title granted by the sovereign, or from the purchase of that title from its previous owner. The land, they maintained, belonged to someone at all times, and insisted that the owners' property rights be respected. Failure to do so would result in lawlessness and anarchy.¹⁴

In the eyes of Federalist officials, none of these goals could be achieved if western settlement were left in the hands of squatters. Fearful of the growing political assertiveness, lack of deference, and disregard for property rights of ordinary citizens in the east, they saw the same tendency toward disorder among the "banditti" whom John Armstrong sought to dislodge. The western rabble had little regard for the rights of property, according to one federal official. "These men . . . have . . . been accustomed to seat themselves on the best of lands, making a tomahawk right, or Improvement, as they term it, supposing that to be sufficient title." Nor could they be trusted to obey the law. Henry Knox worried that squatters would become so numerous that they would "defy the power of the United States" and "wrest all the immense property of the western territories out of the hand of the public." George Washington expressed a deeper concern: that westerners, cut off from the power of the federal government and commercial intercourse with the east, would "become a different people from us" and "instead of adding strength to the Union, may . . . become a formidable and dangerous neighbor." Even after three generations had passed, John Jay speculated, settlers might not "be fit to govern themselves."¹⁵

To counter this threat to property, order, and national unity, Federalist lawmakers and officials sought to place the process of western settlement firmly under the control of the federal government. With great effort, they acquired sole dominion over the western lands of the nation, and, with the Ordinance of 1785, they set up a rational, orderly system for the survey and sale of those lands. As land was acquired from Indians, it would be divided into an endless series of townships of six miles square, with each township parceled into lots of a mile square, or 640 acres. The land was to be sold at auction, with alternate townships being sold whole and in

lots of 640 acres. No one was permitted to settle on the land without first purchasing it. The Trade and Intercourse Act, first passed in 1790, gave the federal government the sole right to acquire Indian lands. It also established federal “factories” to trade with Indians, and forbade anyone else from trading with them unless they were licensed by the United States. With these laws, Federalist lawmakers placed Indian relations and the distribution of western lands under exclusive federal control.

National political leaders chose politically reliable, nationalist gentlemen to exercise this authority. Gentlemen were already personally interested in the west, as most speculated in frontier lands. Congress sought to insure that these men would mediate the settlement process. Lot sizes of 23,040 and 640 acres were designed for such men. 640 acres might be affordable to very prosperous emigrants, but the vast majority of settlers, who settled on the public lands with very little capital, would have to buy their land from speculators.¹⁶

Federal officials selected these same men to govern the new territories. Western territories were governed by presidential appointees rather than elected officials, and presidents before the 1820s bestowed most federal positions upon genteel land speculators. Federal appointments to the Northwest Territory overlapped significantly with the officer list of the Ohio Company, which purchased a million and a half acres from Congress. Rufus Putnam became surveyor general of the United States; Winthrop Sargent was appointed secretary of the territory; John Cleve Symmes, Samuel Holden Parsons, and James M. Varnum were named federal judges. All were company leaders. Another major speculator, Arthur St. Clair, was selected as territorial governor.¹⁷

As Andrew Cayton has observed, these speculator-officials sought “to . . . integrate” frontier areas “into the Atlantic cultural and commercial community. . . . They sought interdependence not independence, urban as much as agrarian development, manufactures as well as farms, social stratification instead of egalitarianism—all overseen by a firm national authority and secured by institutions like churches and schools.” To this end, they sought to establish a strong federal presence, enforce the rule of law, and encourage what Washington called “regular” and “compact” settlement in the West. Above all, they sought to compel settlers to respect private property as defined by federal and state law—property defined as individual dominion over land without the welter of restrictions that attended feudal property, obtained through possession of paper title that derived from the federal government.¹⁸

Despite their opposing visions for western expansion and their struggle for control of that process, Federalist officials and frontier squatters forged an oddly symbiotic relationship. George Washington occasionally sent in the army to dislodge squatters from Indian lands, but their efforts were no more effective than John Armstrong’s foray west of the Ohio in 1785. Settlers’ incursions sparked a cycle of violence across the Ohio frontier, leading Washington to call up the army against the Western Indian Confederacy in 1790. The Confederacy dealt the United States humiliating defeats at the Battle of the Pumpkin Fields and the Battle of the Wabash. In response, Congress increased the size of the US Army, while Washington charged General Anthony Wayne with improving its discipline. In 1794, Wayne’s army defeated the Western Confederacy; federal negotiators quickly pressed the vanquished Confederacy to cede most of what is now the state of Ohio to the United States.¹⁹

Thus began a symbiosis among squatters, speculators, and the federal government that prevailed under Federalists, Republicans, Democrats, and Whigs alike. Though they might despise squatters, federal officials found it harder to restrain them than to pressure Indians for land cessions. One tract at a time, they rewarded squatters by incorporating the lands they invaded into the United States and made them available for settlement. Speculators, who tended to be better connected than squatters (many of them were federal legislators and executive officers), pressed Congress and the executive branch to negotiate for Indian lands and to survey and sell those lands quickly. When they succeeded, they reaped the reward as well as squatters, as the new lands were open to speculative investment as well as settlement. When the better lands in a cession were taken up, another wave of squatters would begin the process anew, invading new lands held by Indians. The federal government became the ally of the squatters it initially despised, and squatters became the vanguard of the territorial expansion of the United States.

Needless to say, the Federalist vision of western development was no match for the squatters who flooded onto Indian and federal lands. But the weakness of the federal government was only one reason among many for the failure of that vision. First of all, too many gentlemen were buying too much land. If the sheer numbers of speculative acres was not sufficient to flood the market and drive down prices, the constant influx of federal land onto the market and the ubiquity of squatting made land speculation a risky proposition indeed. Those proprietors lucky enough to find numerous buyers discovered that they were poor and slow to pay. If these were not problems enough, there was the nightmare of unclear titles. Most speculative lands surveyed before the Northwest Ordinance suffered from vague and overlapping boundaries, which proprietors interpreted aggressively to their own benefit. Insecure title encouraged lawsuits, which could exhaust an investor's funds, while they discouraged settlers from paying. All of these troubles took place in a context of excessive leverage. Genteel land speculators often went into debt to buy a large tract of land or a share in a land company, then mortgaged that land or share for funds with which to buy still more land or shares. When a payment came due, most could not meet their obligations. The majority lost their shirts.²⁰

Even when their speculative schemes prospered, gentlemen helped create a social order in which they could not survive as gentlemen. Sharing a deep hatred of hereditary privilege, they rejected primogeniture both in law and in their own wills. From the 1780s on, they divided their estates equally among their sons and sometimes among all their children. For similar reasons, they came to reject the consolidation of family fortunes as a prerequisite for marriage. At the same time, their need for income increased. Genteel standards of consumption increased during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, even as the post-Revolutionary generation chose genteel idleness over a professional calling. Pressed on one side by an increasing cost of living and on the other by diminished capital stocks and a lack of professional income, most gentlemen went broke. A large number of gentlemen and ladies remained solvent, especially in the seaboard cities; but by 1830 they were no longer numerous enough to inspire visions of a gentry-ruled west or to exercise significant political power at the national level.²¹

Then there were the effects of partisan democratization. From the 1790s on, increasing numbers of states abolished property requirements for voting. Western

territories and states were among the first to allow propertyless white men to vote. Kentucky and Ohio developed vibrant party organizations after 1800, and all western states did so after 1828. Whenever they did so, parties (especially the Republicans and the Democrats) developed rigorous techniques of mass education and mobilization. Increasingly, winning elections depended on winning the active participation of ordinary voters. Thomas Jefferson's Republican party and (after 1828) Andrew Jackson's Democratic party appealed directly to western voters; in particular, they had every incentive to side with white settlers against Indians and existing federal policy.²²

This did not mean that Republican and Democratic politicians and officials turned against speculators, however. Most national politicians speculated in land. For the majority of them who were lawyers, a major part of their professional income came from representing speculators as lawyers and land agents. Speculation was an important occupation among their friends, colleagues, clients, and political allies. Speculators exercised enormous influence in Congress and the presidency, both through explicit lobbying and, more frequently, through the pleas and suggestions of friends and political allies. The precise place of speculation in politicians' accumulation strategies, the culture and influence of speculators and their representatives in national politics, and the relationship of both to policy-making are issues crying out for further study. For the present, it is safe to suggest tentatively that, for national politicians, the public lands were an abundant resource, which spared most of them the pain of making difficult political choices. There was land enough to make concessions to multiple constituencies, serve numerous policy goals, and attend to their own personal interest. While Republicans and Democrats sought to appeal to squatters, they did so in a way that also accommodated speculators' interests.²³

From the mid-1790s on, a handful of Congressional Republicans called for reforming land policy to facilitate purchase by small farmers. In 1799, William Henry Harrison, the newly elected Congressional delegate from the Northwest Territory, took leadership of these reformers. Like other advocates of reform, Harrison was a large-scale speculator; his father-in-law, John Cleves Symmes, was a principal in the Ohio Company. But Harrison's constituents were deeply discontented with federal land policy, and they sent him to the capital with a clear set of demands: smaller tracts, lower prices, more accessible land offices, federal credit to buyers, and preemption rights for squatters. Harrison and his allies drafted a new law that acceded to some of these demands. The Land Law of 1800 created four land offices in the Northwest Territory. (Previously, land sales had taken place in a handful of cities in the Atlantic seaboard states.) The minimum price remained steady at \$2 per acre, but Congress now offered credit. Purchasers would have to pay 25 percent down and the remainder over four years. Finally, the law cut the minimum purchase in half, from 640 to 320 acres. The Land Law of 1800 was not a rousing victory for squatters—lot sizes and prices were still prohibitively high for most purchasers, and their demands for preemption fell on deaf ears. Indeed, speculators and prosperous settlers were most likely to benefit from the law. In 1804, Republicans in Congress passed a new bill that added more land offices, waived interest for buyers who were current on their payments, and, most gratifying to less wealthy migrants, lowered the minimum purchase to 160 acres. These two laws turned the trickle of land sales into a flood, as small purchasers bought up quarter sections. Sales at the regional

land offices jumped from 68,000 acres in 1800 to almost half a million in 1801, and jumped again to nearly 600,000 in 1805.²⁴

Republicans continued to trim federal land policy to the shared interests of squatters and speculators during Jefferson's and Madison's presidencies—mostly by offering debt relief to purchasers who had failed to keep current on their payments. Republican Indian policy, which included steady pressure on Indians to sell their holdings, served both groups' interests as well. At the same time, squatters and large-scale speculators began to forge a *modus vivendi*. Both groups shared an interest in paying the minimum government price for land; a bidding war might cost a speculator his profits or a squatter his home. From the first land sales in which poor and middling settlers participated, a "strained good will" prevailed at government auctions, with everyone trying to avoid a bidding war. When anyone bid for a squatter's claim, the attending locals responded with outrage, threats, and sometimes actual violence. Before long, competitive bidding became a rarity. Sometimes large-scale speculators bought large tracts which they sold to attending settlers before the auction had concluded. (Unfortunately, we know nothing about the terms of these resales). At others, speculators carefully avoided bidding for squatters' homes. By 1806, the House Committee on Public Lands reported that "few men are willing to incur the resentment of their neighbors by bidding for their property, at public vendue."²⁵

This stability in the relations between squatters, speculators, and the federal government broke down after 1812. The population of the United States more than doubled, from 3.9 million to 9.6 million, between 1790 and 1820. The amount of land available for settlement failed to keep up; the number of inhabitants per square mile in the United States increased from 4.5 to 5.5 during that period. The War itself changed the terrain as well. The main supporters and political beneficiaries of the war espoused a strident, militaristic nationalism. The War Hawks (or, to use their postwar name, the National Republicans) depicted the United States as a young, energetic nation, destined to demonstrate its greatness (and its superiority to European monarchies) through military exploits and territorial conquest. Though repeated military defeats did little to validate this sense of American destiny, Andrew Jackson's spectacular victory at New Orleans vindicated the most ardent nationalists. More concretely, the removal of British forts from the trans-Allegheny West, Britain's abandonment of its Indian allies, and the US acquisition of Florida from the Spanish left the United States as the sole imperial hegemon east of the Mississippi. The war on the northern and western frontiers had rekindled Indian-hating while fusing it with an expansionist vision of American national destiny. In important ways, the federal government validated that imperial and racial vision by demanding millions of acres from western Indians (both the late enemies and allies of the United States) as the cost of peace.²⁶

The late 1810s also transformed the market for land. The War of 1812 halted frontier settlement during a period of rapid population growth; the end of the war unleashed the pent-up demand for land. This demand was increased by parallel booms in the world cotton market and in domestic credit. Textile factories in England and the United States multiplied rapidly while older manufacturies converted from wool and linen to cotton. Aspiring planters rushed to meet the demand; along with an army of speculators, they bought up lands newly wrenched from the Cherokee,

Choctaw, and Creek nations. At the same time, state legislators began chartering large numbers of banks, which fed a rapid expansion of credit and the money supply.²⁷

These developments sparked a level of westward migration unprecedented in the young nation's history. Settlers came "like an avalanche," one missionary wrote. "It seemed as though Kentucky and Tennessee were breaking up and moving to the 'Far West.'" The migrants included unprecedented numbers of squatters. Those with the cash to buy land immediately joined the exodus as well. Particularly in the newly opened cotton-growing territories of western Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, speculators and planters overwhelmed federal land offices. The number of acres sold at the St. Stephens, Alabama land office jumped from 1,400 in 1814 to 49,000 in 1815 to 212,000 in 1817; business at the Washington, DC office increased from 6,000 to 352,000 acres between 1814-15 and 1816-17. At a single sale at the Milledgeville, Georgia land office in August of 1817, 121,000 acres changed hands; another quarter of a million acres found buyers in October. Observers noticed a dramatic change in the makeup of the crowd at southern auctions: suddenly the land offices were filled with gentlemen, as planters and speculators bid for prime cotton lands. Everywhere, old arrangements to prevent competitive bidding fell apart in the scramble to purchase.²⁸

Backed by an expansionist state, justified by an aggressive territorial nationalism, and threatened by competition from speculators and planters, squatters became more assertive. Squatting became so pervasive after the war that Edward Tiffin, the Commissioner of the General Land Office, proposed dispatching militias to expel them. But Alexander McNair, the register at St. Louis, dissuaded him. "Five militia men in this Territory," he warned, "would not march against the intruders on public lands. Much feeling has been excited on this subject." When a land sale was announced in St Stephens, Alabama territory, squatters "threaten[ed] with assassination, any person who will dare to bid for the lands they, those Intruders, occupy." As the sale approached, they crowded into the town, alternately intimidating and pleading with planters and speculators. At the sale, the local register reported, "civil officers, in the discharge of their *official duties*, . . . were *grossly insulted*, and the *laws disregarded*. . . ." The Surveyor General for the district south of Tennessee concluded that land sales "cannot with safety, or propriety, be opened & conducted in that District. . . . No gentleman would be safe in that District who would bid for, or purchase any of those squatters' settlements." In Illinois, squatters whose claims had been purchased by others simply refused to give them up.²⁹

Unauthorized settlers were equally assertive in claiming Indian lands. But where they fought speculators and slave owners for access to federal lands, illegal settlers joined with these groups in laying claim to Indian territory. In doing so, they articulated what may have been a new element in anti-Indian thought. As Kathleen DuVal has shown, after the war westerners inserted the tenets of frontier Indian-hating into the more recent debate over "civilizing" Indians. Whites, western petitioners insisted, were by definition civilized; Indians were inherently incapable of becoming so. This innate savagery left them with an inferior claim to the soil. The inhabitants of Arkansas County, Arkansas Territory complained that Congress was "unnecessarily lavishing large Portions of Public and Private Property on Savages while a total indifference or neglect is manifested towards their fellow citizen."³⁰

These pleas were backed by growing political muscle. Because of their growing numbers and the widespread adoption of something like universal white male suffrage in the new territories and states, squatters gained significant influence in western politics. And with five new western states admitted to the Union between 1812 and 1821, westerners enjoyed growing weight in national politics. In 1815, President Madison turned peace negotiations with Indians over to two influential westerners. Andrew Jackson negotiated terms with the southwestern Indians, while William Henry Harrison met with the northwestern tribes. Neither man distinguished between peoples who had fought with the British, remained neutral, or aided the Americans in the late war; they treated all as conquered enemies. Both wrested huge tracts from their negotiating partners, bringing tens of millions of acres into the United States.

While eastern Republicans sanctioned these land grabs, they sought to curb further squatting. In December 1815, President Madison ordered the "uninformed or evil-disposed persons" who illegally occupied public and Indian lands "forthwith to remove therefrom." To those that refused to vacate their claims, he promised to use "such military force as may become necessary" to force their removal. Squatters and their supporters flooded Congress with petitions while western officials lobbied and spoke in the squatters' defense. Illegal settlers, Representative John McLean of Ohio wrote, "have fought, and some have bled, in defense of their homes. Does policy require that the arm of the Government should be lifted against them. . . . In the hour of attack, their bravery secured them from savage destruction. Shall their government, now, visit them with more certain ruin[?]" The westerners' efforts paid off. Madison's proclamation was never enforced, and Congress passed a law allowing squatters to remain on their claims until they were sold. Later threats to expel squatters met the same fate. Never again did the US army mobilize to expel squatters from federal lands.³¹

State governments proved even more responsive to squatters' demands. Like federal politicians, however, they were most solicitous on those issues where squatters' and speculators' interests coincided. During the late 1810s and 1820s, numerous western territories entered the second stage of territorial government, which allowed inhabitants to adopt a constitution and elect a legislature; other territories became states. The new governments were far more responsive to local sentiment. Several of them launched an aggressive campaign against Indian territory within their boundaries. In doing so, they advocated a new policy: the removal of Indians to territories west of the Mississippi. Drawing on their constituents' depiction of Indians as irreclaimable savages, western politicians argued that Indian land claims retarded national development. The Arkansas Territorial Assembly remonstrated Congress for allowing "that small remnant of the Quapaw tribe" to claim "nearly three Millions of acres." That policy left land "which would sustain fifty thousand souls . . . scarcely furrowed by a plough." The solution, they made clear, was to remove the Indians west of the Mississippi. The Missouri assembly introduced another reason for removal in 1824: the need for unitary sovereignty. The Assembly explained, "To the state, the existence of separate communities within its bosom, and independent of its laws, is a palpable evil, an anomaly in government, and direct inconsistency with the policy and jurisdiction of a sovereign state."³²

In pressing for Indian removal, western territories and states made use of a powerful weapon: squatters. John Mack Faragher has shown how the territorial

government of Missouri refused to defend Indians when squatters invaded their lands and seized their improvements. This policy created an environment of impunity that made life within the territory intolerable for Indians. This effect, in turn, put pressure on the federal government to support removal. In submitting a plan for the removal of Indians from their state, the Missouri General Assembly depicted squatter assaults on Indians and their property as a force of nature which required federal intervention:

They have suffered too much from the contact and pressure of a white population not to know its effect. They are too few in number to oppose any resistance to the moral and physical causes which must operate to their degradation, and to the further diminution of their numbers. They must know that their present position is temporary; that an effort to remove them is incessantly made; that the power of the State is against them, and that, sooner or later, they must go.³³

By the mid-1820s, this campaign began to change federal policy. In response to lobbying by the governments of Georgia and Missouri, President James Monroe asked Congress to provide for voluntary Indian removal three times between 1817 and 1824. Adopting the reasoning of the Missouri legislature, he depicted white incursions as an unstoppable force and concluded that removal was the only resolution to the problem. "Surrounded as they are, and pressed as they will be on every side by the white population," he argued, "it will be difficult if not impossible for them . . . to sustain order." In 1824, Congress agreed, and federal officials began pressuring Indians in several states and territories to move further west.³⁴

By supporting western assaults on Indian sovereignty, Monroe and Congress encouraged further assaults. As Congress was debating voluntary removal, Governor George Michael Troup laid claim to Creek lands within the state of Georgia. In doing so, he sought to create a political alliance between backcountry farmers and the state's slaveholding and financial elites. Since 1819, Troup's faction in state politics, backed largely by the state's slaveholders and financiers, had faced a political insurgency led by the Indian fighter John Clark, who had the support of most debtors and backcountry farmers. To end this plebeian political insurgency, Troup appealed to Clark's followers on the one issue that they shared with his supporters: Indian land. In open violation of federal law, Troup negotiated a treaty with his *metis* cousin that ceded all of the Creek nation's lands in Georgia to the state. Creek leaders rejected the treaty, and the newly elected President Adams suspended its implementation. Georgia remained adamant, refusing even to accept a federal treaty that left the Creeks a small portion of their land. In the end, Adams backed down. Georgia got the Creeks' land and Troup sought to consolidate his new multi-class coalition with a campaign to seize the Cherokee nation's possessions as well.³⁵

Removal became federal policy when Andrew Jackson, a veteran Indian fighter from Tennessee, assumed the presidency in 1829. In December 1829, with Jackson in the White House and gold recently discovered in Cherokee soils, the Georgia legislature annulled the Cherokee constitution and declared Cherokee territory to be subject to Georgia law. Like earlier state campaigns to dispossess Indians, the legislators justified their action by depicting the Cherokees as irredeemable savages who

retarded the state's progress and by arguing that an independent sovereignty (in this case, the Cherokees) within their state was intolerable. President Jackson gave his unqualified support to the state, declaring that Indians in every state must emigrate or submit to the laws of the states. Jackson proposed a law to encourage all eastern Indians to trade their lands for territories west of the Mississippi. In endorsing removal, he made squatters' long-standing association of property with occupation and improvement a staple of national politics. "It seems to me visionary," he declared to Congress, "that claims can be allowed on tracts of country on which [Indians] have neither dwelt nor made improvements, merely because they have seen them from the mountain or passed them in the chase." Like other western politicians, he tied this producerist vision of property rights to a racial vision that associated whiteness with progress and Indianness with savagery and stagnation:

Philanthropy could not wish to see this continent restored to the condition in which it was found by our forefathers. What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms, embellished with all the improvements which art can devise or industry execute, occupied by more than 12,000,000 happy people, and filled with the blessings of liberty, civilization, and religion?³⁶

Congress promptly granted Jackson's wish. From then on, the official policy of the United States was removal of eastern Indians to lands west of the Mississippi. Officially, removal was to be voluntary, but Jackson and his successors employed the old weapons of fraudulent treaties and military coercion to extract Indian leaders' "agreement" to emigrate. These policies gradually became articles of partisan conviction. Jackson's Indian Removal bill passed the senate with all of Jackson's supporters voting for the bill and all his opponents voting against it. But the House of Representatives split along moral and sectional lines, with evangelicals and their sympathizers constituting the core of opposition. Over the course of Jackson's and Martin Van Buren's administrations, Democrats came to support Indian removal reliably, while the new Whig party, established after Jackson's reelection in 1832, and which enjoyed significant evangelical support, came to oppose it.³⁷

Like those of their Jeffersonian forbears, the Democrats' land policies focused on measures that could win the support of both squatters and speculators. During the 1820s and 1830s, Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, along with other western Democrats, championed a series of relief bills that provided more time for purchasers of public lands to pay and allowed delinquent debtors to return a portion of their land to the government in lieu of payment. They also championed graduation, a policy that lowered the price of public lands that went unsold for a lengthy period. Whigs denounced these measures as boondoggles for greedy, overreaching individuals and as encouragement to hasty, haphazard settlement. Like the Federalists, they sought to promote a slower, more compact settlement of the West, one in which internal improvements, schools, commerce, and manufacturing moved west alongside the plough. Their signature land policy, championed by Henry Clay, was to distribute a portion of federal land revenues to the states as a fund to finance internal improvements and schools.³⁸

Most Democrats were slower to champion squatters' rights when they conflicted with those of speculators, but here, too, squatters gradually won their support. Since the 1780s, their main demand had been preemption: the right of the person who had settled and improved a piece of land to buy that land without competition from others. Petitions for preemption multiplied in the years after 1815, especially during the depression years of the early 1820s. Since 1800, Congress had occasionally granted preemption rights to specific groups of settlers. In 1813 and 1814, it granted the same privilege to people already settled in Illinois and Missouri, respectively. In 1830, it passed the first general preemption act. The law gave squatters who had farmed anywhere on the public domain during the previous year the right of first refusal on the plots they occupied. This right was to last only two years, but, predictably, Congress renewed the law repeatedly throughout the decade.³⁹

The Preemption Act of 1830 fell short of most petitioners' requests, as it applied only to those who were already settled on public land. Most petitioners wanted *prospective* preemption—a guarantee that all squatters on public lands would have the sole right to buy their claims at the minimum government price. Some went further still, calling for the land to be given, free of charge, to actual settlers. William Kenney, an Illinois Jackson man, reminded Andrew Jackson in 1829 that “there are thousands of people in this country who have families to support, and have not the means of procuring a piece of land for homes, who are waiting with great anxiety in expectation that you will recommend to Congress to make some provision whereby the industrious poor may become the owners, each of a piece of land, by actual settlement on, and improvement of the same.” Squatters' influence at Washington was growing, but it was far from determinative.⁴⁰

Illegal settlers did not simply wait for government action, however. Like tens of thousands of other Americans, they sought to change their social and moral environment through voluntary association and collective action. During the 1830s, as competitive bidding at government land sales reached another peak, unauthorized settlers in the western territories and states founded claim clubs and squatters' associations. Usually organized on a countywide basis, these new associations formalized rules that squatters had enforced on an informal basis since the creation of the public domain, if not before. Their purpose, as the Johnson County, Iowa club declared, was to ensure that “each and every settler may be secured in the claim or claims to which he is justly entitled.” Each club elected a register who recorded the location and boundaries of squatters' claims in his jurisdiction. Only members could record their claims, and members were required to defend every other member's claim from interlopers. Whenever a conflict arose over a claim, the club's elected arbitrators would adjudicate the dispute.

When the county's lands came up for sale, each member's claim would be bid for at the minimum government price by the club's elected bidder. Members assembled *en masse* at the government auction to prevent anyone else from bidding for their claims. When the members of the Lake County Squatters' Union attended a sale in La Porte, Indiana in March 1837, “some trouble had been anticipated.” “Determined that no speculator would bid upon their lands,” several members came armed, and the group declared its willingness “to use force, if it should be necessary, to secure the right each squatter claimed of buying his own quarter section at one dollar

and a quarter an acre.” With this show of force, no one dared bid on the squatters’ claims, and the sale came off without incident.⁴¹

Robert Swierenga and Allan Bogue are probably correct in arguing that at least some squatters’ associations protected claims held for speculative gain. But they are certainly wrong to suggest that all club members, indeed all squatters, were speculators. Clubs adopted a tangle of rules designed to insure that they defended only the homes or intended homes of their members: they limited the size of claims that could be protected (160 acres in Lake County, Indiana; 480 in Johnson County, Iowa); they limited membership to “actual settler[s] upon government lands,” and confiscated “fraudulent claims [made] for speculative purposes”; and they required that members continuously improve their claims. The clubs’ purpose was the same as the petition campaign for preemption: to ensure that anyone who settled on public lands got the exclusive right to buy their land at the minimum government price.⁴²

Though claim clubs seem to have been successful in defending squatters’ claims, they hardly banished large-scale speculators from the scene. They left speculators free to buy any land not claimed by members. A lot of land fell into that category: Robert Swierenga estimates that speculators owned more than half of the state of Iowa in 1861. On a day-to-day basis, associations and their members typically worked out a *modus vivendi* with speculators. Speculators frequently loaned squatters the cash they needed to buy their claims. Conflict between squatters and non-resident speculators did not disappear, of course. Claim clubs continued to excoriate the latter in their public pronouncements, and they proved a dangerous opponent to any speculator who might bid against a squatter. Squatters, moreover, routinely stripped lands held by non-residents of their timber.⁴³

As the claim clubs defended squatters’ claims in the territories, preemption gained strength in Congress. Westerners swamped both houses with petitions for squatter’s rights during the 1830s, and they won growing support in the Capital. Political leaders split along both partisan and sectional lines. Democrats praised squatters as hardy pioneers who, through hard work and courage in the face of Indian attacks, were building an empire for liberty. Preemption promoted self-reliance, hard work, and populist economic development. It allowed the poor to accumulate property, sparing them from becoming dependent on the wealthy for their daily bread. Senator Clement C. Clay of Alabama declared that the core question was “whether the government was to sell the public domain in small quantities to men of small capital, who would immediately occupy, improve and render it productive, or whether it was better policy to sell . . . to bands of speculators and capitalists in large quantities, to lie idle and unprofitable till they could extort the desired profit from those whose necessities compel them to have it?” Whigs split along sectional lines. Most eastern Whigs, as well as those from older western states like Ohio and Kentucky, opposed preemption. Henry Clay embraced the Federalists’ view of squatters as a “lawless rabble,” strangers to bourgeois virtues of hard work, self-restraint, and patient accumulation. Rather than working for their property, they stole it from the United States government. “The whole preemption system,” he declared, “is a violation of all law, and an encouragement to persons to go on the public lands and take the choicest portion of them.” Its success would reward lawlessness, retard healthy economic development, and populate the west with a lawless, undesirable population.

Western Whigs could ill afford to voice such beliefs or to vote against squatters' rights, however.⁴⁴

Thus it was a Whig Congress that finally passed a general, prospective preemption law in 1841. The new law empowered any head of a family, widow, or single man over the age of twenty-one who was a citizen or had declared his intention to become one to venture onto federal lands that had already been surveyed and claim up to 160 acres. Settlers had one year to buy their claims. Those who failed to settle and make improvements were disqualified; so were migrants who had already made a preemption claim or owned more than 320 acres elsewhere. Eastern Whigs extracted a symbolic concession by forcing Democrats to include a provision distributing ten percent of land sales to the states to fund internal improvements, but an amendment effectively gutted this stipulation.⁴⁵

To many historians, the Preemption Act of 1841 was "the most important agrarian measure ever passed by Congress" and "a victory of pioneer America over the more established eastern order."⁴⁶ Along with Indian removal, the law certainly marked the culmination of a major shift in American land policy. Where the founders had sought to restrain squatters and create an orderly, economically diversified, and hierarchical West under the benevolent guidance of nationalist gentlemen, now the federal government embraced both squatters' and speculators' demand for an ever-accelerating expropriation of Indian lands and sanctioned squatters' unrestrained and more egalitarian style of settlement. The federal government became a giant claim club, guaranteeing squatters an exclusive right to the land on which they settled. The principle that the person who occupied and improved the land had a superior claim to it was validated by federal law.

In practice, however, the law made little difference. In all but a few cases, collective action had already guaranteed squatters' rights. And collective action seems to have been required despite the passage of the law, as claim clubs proliferated after 1841. At most, the law ratified the pre-existing *modus vivendi* between settlers and non-resident speculators; as before, the latter were free to buy up any tracts not claimed by squatters. Indeed, speculators quickly found ways to use the law to their advantage. As Malcolm Rohrbach has shown, many a frontiersman made extra cash by filing a preemption claim, making modest improvements, and selling the land to an investor. Try as they might to define themselves in opposition to speculators, squatters, even in the midst of political victory, remained inextricably connected to them.

In the end, agrarian conflict and land policy in the early American republic was shaped by both the conflict between squatters, speculators, and the state and the connections and collaborations between them. United in a common campaign to take over Indian land, settlers and non-resident investors championed competing ideas about property and clashing visions of western and national development. Despite these competing visions, the two groups repeatedly found ways to coexist peacefully, even to cooperate when buying government land. Whatever their sympathies and intentions, federal officials found themselves accommodating both groups. This was itself a surprise: those officials at first despised squatters and sought to make on the public lands a paternalist utopia, dominated by gentleman speculators. Despised and disempowered, squatters refused to go along, again and again compelling the federal government to ratify the facts that they made on the

ground. A widening suffrage, the rise of political parties, and the political ascendance of more sympathetic parties raised the stakes in the conflict, allowing squatters and their political allies to shape federal policy not only through resistance, but through lobbying and advocacy. The result was a transformation in American ideology: a decisive rejection of gentry-led capitalist development in favor of grass-roots led economic growth, and an official embrace of the notion that unclaimed land belonged to the man who occupied and worked it. This victory was never a final vindication of squatters or an ejection of large-scale speculators from the public domain, however. The most sympathetic national politicians treated the public lands as an abundant good, to be shared among those constituencies who had the clout to affect policy. There were losers in this political game: Indians (and later Mexicans), who were outsiders to the political system. But there were no clear winners, only rival claimants whose very resilience forced one another to collaborate amid the conflict.

NOTES

- 1 John Armstrong to the Commissioner of Public Lands, n.d., in William H. Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Paper: The Life and Public Services of Arthur St. Clair* (Cincinnati, 1882), 2:4; Armstrong to Colonel Hamar, 12 April 1785, in Archer Butler Hulbert, ed., *Ohio in the Time of the Confederation* (Marietta, OH: Marietta Historical Commission, 1918), 106–9; Andrew R.L. Cayton, *The Frontier Republic: Ideology and Politics in the Ohio Country, 1780–1825* (Kent, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1986), 10.
- 2 Paul Wallace Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1968); Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderlands of the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 136–202; James McFarlane to Governor Meriwether Lewis, Dec. 11, 1808, quoted in John Mack Faragher, “‘More Motley than Mackinaw’: From Ethnic Mixing to Ethnic Cleansing on the Frontier of the Lower Missouri, 1783–1833,” in Andrew R.L. Cayton and Fredrika J. Teute, *Contact Points: American Frontiers from the Mohawk Valley to the Mississippi, 1750–1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 316.
- 3 Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760–1820* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); *idem*, “Agrarian Independence: Northern Land Rioters after the Revolution,” in Alfred F. Young, ed., *Beyond the American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), 222–25; Reeve Huston, *Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Thomas Humphrey, *Land and Liberty: Hudson Valley Riots in the Age of Revolution* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004); Charles Brooks, *Frontier Settlement and Market Revolution: The Holland Land Purchase* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 29–46, 54–55; Paul Wallace Gates, *Fifty Million Acres: Conflicts over Kansas Land Policy, 1854–1890* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1954); *idem*, *History of Public Land Law Development* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1968); *idem*, “California’s Embattled Settlers,” *California Historical Society Quarterly* 41 (1962):99–130; Roy Robbins, *Our Landed Heritage: The Public Domain, 1776–1936* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1942); Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in*

- the Rural South From Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Michael W. Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South: Politics and Agricultural Change During Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989); Julia Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860–1870* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 4 See, for example, Paul Wallace Gates, *Landlords and Tenants on the Prairie Frontier* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973); Gates, *Public Land Law Development*; Gates, *Farmers' Age*; Gates, *Fifty Million Acres*; Gates, "California's Embattled Settlers"; Robins, *Our Landed Heritage*; Henry Christman, *Tin Horns and Calico: A Decisive Episode in the Emergence of Democracy* (1945; reprint ed., Cornwallville, NY: Hope Farm Press, 1978); David Maldwyn Ellis, *Landlords and Farmers in the Hudson-Mohawk Region, 1790–1850* (reprint ed., New York: Octagon Books, 1967).
- 5 Bogue, *Prairie to Corn Belt*; Bogue, "The Iowa Claim Clubs: Symbol and Substance," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (1958) 231–53; Robert P. Swierenga, *Pioneers and Profits: Land Speculation on the Iowa Frontier* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1968); Sung Bok Kim, *Landlord and Tenant in Colonial New York: Manorial Society, 1664–1775* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).
- 6 E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origins of the Black Act* (New York: Pantheon, 1975); Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* 50 (1971) 76–136; Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?" *Social History* 3 (1978) 133–165.
- 7 Taylor, *Liberty Men*; *idem*, "Agrarian Independence"; Paul Benjamin Moyer, *Wild Yankees: The Struggle for Independence Along Pennsylvania's Revolutionary Frontier* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Huston, *Land and Freedom*; Brooks, *Frontier Settlement*; Humphrey, *Land and Liberty*; Thomas Summerhill, *Harvest of Dissent: Agrarianism in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*; Fitzgerald, *Union League Movement*; Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*; Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderlands of the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 2006); Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Faragher, "More Motley".
- 8 Taylor, *Liberty Men*; *idem*, *Divided Ground*.
- 9 Taylor, *Liberty Men*, 24–29; Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 42; Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 21–35, 53–57, 64–74. See also the scattered evidence in Gates, *Public Land Law Development* and *Idem*, *Farmer's Age*.
- 10 Thurston Whiting and Benjamin Brackett to Henry Knox, Sept. 7, 1801, quoted in Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors*, 95. The radical, agrarian wing of the New York anti-rent movement also claimed that land was a "common inheritance" to all humans. See Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 138–40, 163–74. On the ubiquity of squatter petitions for preemption rights, see Gates, *Public Land Law*, chapter 4, 7; Rohrbaugh, *Land Office Business*.
- 11 "Petition of the Inhabitants West of the Ohio River (1785)," in Hulbert, *Ohio in the Time of Federation*, 104–06. See also the squatter's petitions in Clarence Edward Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1934), 26 vols.

- 12 Whiting and Brackett to Knox, in Taylor, *Liberty Men*, 95; Petition from settlers on the Scioto River, in Carter, *Territorial Papers*, 2:542, 548–49.
- 13 White, *The Middle Ground*, 368–78, 418–23; Taylor, *The Divided Ground*, 136–41; Charles Grant, ed., *Letters, Journals, and Writings of Benjamin Hawkins, Selections* (Savannah, GA: Beehive Press, 1980).
- 14 Cayton, *Frontier Republic*, 12–32; Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors*, 49–59; Malcolm Rohrbough, *The Land Office Business: The Settlement and Administration of American Public Lands, 1789–1837* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 13–14; Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development*.
- 15 Cayton, *Frontier Republic*, 12–25 (quotations on 23–24); John R. Van Atta, “‘A Lawless Rabble’: Henry Clay and the Cultural Politics of Squatters’ Rights, 1832–1841,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 28 (2008) 342; Taylor, *Liberty Men*, 57–60.
- 16 Ordinance of 1785, in Wayne D. Rasmussen, ed., *Agriculture in the United States: A Documentary History*; Cayton, *Frontier Republic*, 12–32; Rohrbough, *Land Office Business*, 13.
- 17 Cayton, *Frontier Republic*, 13–14, 24; Rohrbough, *Land Office Business*, 20–22.
- 18 Cayton, *Frontier Republic*, 12–32 (quotation on 21); Taylor, *Liberty Men*, 49–59.
- 19 Stuart Banner, *How the Indians Lost their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 124–29, 139–40; Rohrbough, *Land Office Business*, 16–17; Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years: The Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, 1780–1834* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); Gates, *Public Land Law*, chapter 4.
- 20 Taylor, *William Cooper’s Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995) Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors*, 24–48, 61–73; Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 19–20; Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 82–101; Gates, *Public Land Law*, chapters 4, 7.
- 21 Alan Taylor, *William Cooper’s Town*; Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 45–47; Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson’s Virginia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 24–26.
- 22 Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: the Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 30, Table A.1; Donald Ratcliffe, *Party Spirit in a Frontier Republic: Democratic Politics in Ohio, 1793–1821* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998); *idem*, *The Politics of Long Division: The Birth of the Second Party System in Ohio, 1818–1828* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000); Thomas Ford, *History of Illinois: From its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847* (New York: S.C. Griggs, 1850); Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 196–201, 287–93, 301–309. Banner makes the point that law-makers had every incentive to side with enfranchised settlers against Indian non-citizens. See Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land*, 144.
- 23 On the genteel character of politics between 1800 and 1828, see Jeffrey Pasley, “*The Tyranny of Printers*”: *Newspaper Politics in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001); *idem*, “Minnows, Spies, and Aristocrats: The Social Crisis of Congress in the Age of Martin Van Buren,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 27 (2007):599–653; Reeve Huston, *Origins of Jacksonian Democracies: Political Practices in the United States, 1812–1840* (book manuscript in process), chapters 1–2. On politicians’ land speculation, and their serving as lawyers and agents to speculators, see, for example, *The Papers of Henry Clay*, ed. James F. Hopkins and Mary W.M. Hargreaves (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959–), vols. 1–2, *passim*; *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, ed. Harold D. Mosser, David R. Hoth, and

- George H. Hoemann (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), vols 4–6, *passim*; *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, ed., Wharles M. Wiltse (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1974), *Correspondence*, Vol 1, *passim*; *The Diary and Journal of Richard Clough Anderson, Jr., 1814–1826*, Alfred Tischendorf and E. Taylor Parks, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1964), 96–100 and *passim*; Rohrbough, *Land Office Business*, 26–27, 98–104.
- 24 Rohrbough, *Land Office Business*, 22–23, 48; Gates, *Public Land Law*, 129–33.
- 25 Gates, *Public Land Law* chapter 7; Rohrbough, *Land Office Business*, 43–46 (quotations on 44 and 45).
- 26 *Historical Statistics of the United States Online*, Table Aa1-5, Population, population density, and land area: 1790–2000; Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790–1820* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).
- 27 Richard Sylla and Robert E. Wright, “U.S. Corporate Development, 1801–1860,” National Science Foundation Grant.
- 28 Rohrbough, *Land Office Business*, 92–96, 112–25; Faragher, “More Motley,” 316.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 61, 92–94, 110; Gates, *Public Land Law*, 134–41.
- 30 Kathleen DuVal, “Debating Identity, Sovereignty, and Civilization: The Arkansas Valley after the Louisiana Purchase,” 48–50; Faragher, “More Motley than Mackinaw,” 314–19.
- 31 Rohrbough, *Land Office Business*, 94–96.
- 32 DuVal, “Debating Identity,” 49, 53–54; Faragher, “More Motley than Mackinaw,” 323.
- 33 Faragher, “More Motley,” 320.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 262–63.
- 36 Andrew Jackson, First Annual Message to Congress, December 8, 1829, in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (New York: Bureau of National Literature, n.d.), 3:1022; *idem*, Second Annual Message to Congress, December 6, 1830, *ibid.*, 3:1084; Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 322–28; Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990).
- 37 Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 326–28; Howe, *What God Hath Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); 352, 357; Fred S. Rolater, “The American Indian and the Origin of the Second American Party System,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 76 (1993): 180–201; Daniel Feller, *The Public Lands In Jacksonian Politics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).
- 38 Robbins, *Our Landed Heritage*, 38–42, 79–88; Gates, *Public Land Law Development* 182–96; Feller, *Public Lands*, 66–188, *passim*.
- 39 Robbins, *Our Landed Heritage*, 50, 76, 79; Rohrbough, *Land Office Business*, 60–61, 103, 200–205.
- 40 Kenney to Jackson, Oct. 8, 1829, quoted in *ibid*, 203.
- 41 Constitution and Records of the Squatter’s Union, Lake County, Indiana, reprinted in Wayne D. Rasmussen, ed., *Agriculture in the United States: A Documentary History* (4 vols; New York: Random House, 1975), 1:344–49; Benjamin Shambaugh, ed., *Constitution and Records of the Claim Association of Johnson County, Iowa* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 3–22.
- 42 Shambaugh, ed., *Constitution*, 7, 10, 17; Constitution and Records of the Squatter’s Union of Lake County, in Rasmussen, *Agriculture*, 1:345–46. A full rebuttal to Swierenga’s and Bogue’s characterization of claim clubs isn’t possible here; the author is working on one and will publish it elsewhere.

- 43 Swierenga, *Pioneers and Profits*; Bogue, “Iowa Claim Clubs”; Bogue, *Prairie to Corn Belt*.
- 44 Speech of Henry Clay, quoted in Robbins, *Our Landed Heritage*, 75; Speech of Clement C. Clay, quoted in *ibid.*, 81; *ibid.*, 74–89; Van Atta, “A Lawless Rabble”. See especially pp. 338–40, 354–56, 358, 364–68.
- 45 Preemption Act of 1841 (5 Stat. 453), reprinted in Rasmussen, *Agriculture*, 1: 525–30; Robbins, *Our Landed Heritage*, 81–90.
- 46 Robbins, *Our Landed Heritage*, 91.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE “HIGH-ROAD TO A SLAVE EMPIRE”

Conflict and the Growth and Expansion of Slavery on the North American Continent



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In the century framed by the Seven Years War and the American Civil War, the United States forged a vast but contested empire for slavery on the North American continent. In 1760, plantation slavery on the North American continent was confined to Britain's five southernmost colonies. And while Britain, Spain, and France vied for imperial supremacy on the North American continent, Native Americans continued to control the continental interior west of the Appalachians. A century later, the United States exercised sovereignty over the core of the North American continent; the enslaved population of what was now the United States had increased from less than 400,000 in 1760 to nearly 4 million in 1860; plantation slavery was thriving across the vast southern interior that stretched from Georgia to Texas; and the United States had supplanted Europe's Caribbean colonies as the main source of slave-produced commodities in the Atlantic World. As Abraham Lincoln wrote in 1861, in the previous decade aggressive slaveholding expansionists had firmly placed the United States on a “high-road to a slave empire.” The great expansion of slavery and empire on the North American continent in the century between the Seven Years War and the American Civil War was nothing short of remarkable; as Lincoln noted, slavery and empire stood at the heart of that transformation.¹

How did an independent United States emerge as the dominant power on the North American continent? How did the United States become the preeminent empire for slavery in the Americas and the Atlantic world in the century framed by the Seven Years War and the American Civil War? While historians have of course addressed these questions, for a long time their answers remained separated by historiographies that removed the United States from the broader history of the Americas and the Atlantic world, and then subsumed the history of slavery's growth and expansion on the North American continent into the inevitable expansion of the United States. Historians also divided the history of the United States into largely distinct colonial, early national, antebellum, and Civil War periods. In turn, historians severed the expansion of slavery and empire in colonial North America through the Seven Years War from the expansion of slavery and the United States after 1776. Likewise, by dividing the history of slavery and expansion under an independent United States into distinct early national and antebellum phases, historians overlooked

the important continuities that connected the expansion of slavery and empire from the 1760s into the 1850s. The fragmentation of American history into narrow, specialized fields such as political and social history similarly narrowed the analyses of historians interested in slavery and expansion. By severing the political history of slavery and expansion from frontier and African-American history, historians analyzed the expansion of slavery in the United States as a purely domestic political matter, determined by internal political factors such as the sectional make-up and racial proclivities of major political parties. Why did slavery expand so rapidly in the United States? According to an older body of literature, aggressive, politically adept southern politicians forged bi-sectional political ties that allowed them to overwhelm scattered and racist northern opposition to slavery expansion until the late 1840s.²

While historians have broadened the scope of their analyses, thanks to the broadening of political history and the Atlantic turn in early American history, other historiographical problems have persisted. Despite recent efforts to situate the expansion of slavery in broader Atlantic, continental, and imperial contexts, in many ways American exceptionalism and nationalism persist in the historiography of slavery, politics, and expansion. Even some of the best recent works on slavery, politics, and expansion continue to analyze the growth of slavery in the interior of the North American continent as a uniquely American phenomenon, created by the expansion of exclusively American institutions and actors, and taking place in distinctively American places and historical periods.³ Though thankfully shorn of the self-congratulatory excesses that once characterized nationalist and exceptionalist interpretations of American history, too much of the historiography on slavery and politics now treats the United States as exceptional in its racism and its commitment to using the powers of the state to promote the interests of slaveholders. Reflecting a broader trend in the historiography of the early American republic, the literature on slavery, politics, and expansion now treats the United States—as nation, nation-state, and empire—as “uniquely immoral or exceptionally disingenuous.”⁴

Over the past decade, however, the historiographies of race and slavery, politics, and empire have changed profoundly and increasingly overlap in both subject matter and chronological scope. Historians now analyze American slavery as a dynamic, Atlantic, imperial, and continental institution that both underwent profound changes and exhibited important continuities from the colonial period through the Civil War. Slaves and free people of color are treated as political actors who shaped the local, national, and imperial politics of race and slavery. African-American history is framed not just as the search for freedom and integration into the mainstream of white American life, but also as a series of broad, hemispheric struggles for autonomy, self-defense, and self-determination.⁵ More broadly, as historians have situated slavery in the United States within broader Atlantic, continental, and world histories, they are increasingly placing the exceptionalism of slavery and racism in the United States in its proper context: the ubiquity of racial hierarchies, slavery and other forms of unfree labor, and state-driven exploitation in the Americas from the early 1500s through the late 1800s.⁶

Whereas political historians once divided the politics of slavery in the United States into distinct early national, antebellum, and Civil War eras, they have increasingly joined these periods by focusing on struggles between slaveholders and others over the deployment of state power to protect and promote—or to attack and

abolish—slavery. In addition, historians have shown how developments in the Atlantic world and on the interior of the North American continent continuously shaped the politics and geopolitics of slavery in British North America and then the United States.⁷ Finally, the expansion of the United States and its emergence as a continental power was once the domain of political and diplomatic historians who tended to treat the expansion of the United States across the North American continent as inevitable. But a generation of scholarship on Native American history, frontiers, and empire has led historians to analyze the expansion of the French, Spanish, and British empires, and the United States, as contingent and contested at every turn. As these works demonstrate, the ability of an empire to deploy state power in the many borderlands of North America determined how, and to what extent, a state or empire's sovereignty prevailed over citizens, subjects, and conquered peoples.⁸

These historiographies—ranging widely over once distinct chronological periods, regions, and topics—are increasingly in conversation with each other. This propitious moment for synthesis allows historians not only to assess the broader implications of these works, but to use them to address big, significant questions centering on the persistence, growth, and expansion of slavery in the post-Revolutionary United States and on the North American continent. When analyzed collectively, these works encourage historians to address fundamental questions centering on the expansion of slavery and empire on the North American continent. Drawing on these works, this chapter focuses on slavery's growth and expansion from the Seven Years War through the American Civil War. Particularly, it focuses on the contested uses of state power to establish, consolidate, and protect both slavery and sovereignty in the numerous and shifting borderlands between slavery and freedom. It also examines how borderland conflicts between planters and others opposed to slavery's expansion contributed to the rapid expansion of both slavery and sovereignty.⁹ It treats planters as a powerful class determined to use state power to maintain mastery over slaves as persons and sovereignty over slavery as an institution. It analyzes the United States as one of several states and empires vying for sovereignty and supremacy over the peoples and places of the North American continent. It argues that the powers of the imperial state—first the British and then the United States—proved instrumental in fostering slavery's growth and expansion. It also focuses on the significant continuities that linked the expansion of slavery and sovereignty in British North America and the United States. Finally, it also focuses on the ways that slaves, free people of color, Native Americans, white settler groups, partisan rivals, and rival sectional and imperial powers challenged slaveholder and state efforts to expand, establish, and consolidate slave societies in slavery's many North American borderlands.

Conflicts between and within empires and states were endemic on the North American continent from the 1760s through the 1860s. Borderland disputes—involving white settler groups, African-American slaves, Native American nations and confederacies, and rival imperial powers—frequently ignited these conflicts. Sometimes slavery played a marginal role in those conflicts; at other times, it played a central role. In either case, these borderland and imperial conflicts invariably resulted in the drawing and redrawing of borders, and frequently resulted in the expansion and consolidation of slavery. From the Seven Years War and the American War for Independence through to the American Civil War, conflicting claims of sovereignty over the frontiers, borderlands, and contested spaces of the North American

continent were staked by a shifting amalgamation of Native American confederacies, imperial powers, and nations. The borders of those states and empires were in constant flux, as was the presence, significance, and stability of slavery, along with the security of slaveholders' property rights. In borderlands and other contested spaces, the expansion and stabilization of slavery often advanced with efforts to turn titular claims of sovereignty into effective control and governance. Whenever slavery expanded into the borderlands of North America, conflicts ensued and the boundaries of slavery and sovereignty shifted. On the North American continent, slavery and sovereignty often advanced together. While American independence and revolution caused significant changes in the history of the North American continent, from the Seven Years War through the American Civil War, important continuities fed the continued growth and expansion of slavery in the eighty years separating independence and civil war.¹⁰

I

The origins of the United States' empire for slavery stretched back to the beginnings of the English empire and African slavery on the North American continent in the 1660s. From the 1660s through the American Civil War, no North American power expanded as extensively as the British Empire and then the United States. Both empires readily used state power to protect slavery, to bolster slaveholders' claims of mastery, to strengthen claims of sovereignty in borderlands, and to conquer new territory to protect slavery in already established colonies or states. The United States became the preeminent North American and Atlantic world empire for slavery in the nineteenth century because it derived from the dominant empire for slavery of the eighteenth century.

In the early 1600s, rivalries between Spain and the emerging nation states of western Europe fostered English, French, and Dutch efforts to establish settlements in North America. By the 1650s, European settlement north of Mexico was confined to scattered outposts in Puritan New England, French Canada, the Dutch Hudson and Delaware River Valleys, the English Chesapeake, and Spanish Florida. The enslavement of Africans existed in each of these European settlements. Yet there was little distinctive about slavery, which was simply the most permanent form of unfree labor in a world where bound labor of some sort seemed ubiquitous to Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans. Indeed, in the first century of European settlement on the North American mainland, the bound labor of indentured Europeans and Native American captives remained more common than the permanent enslavement of Africans. In the two regions where the enslavement of Africans was most prevalent—the English Chesapeake and the Dutch Hudson Valley—there were perhaps 900 African slaves in the Chesapeake and 500 slaves in New Netherlands at mid-century. Finally, through the mid-seventeenth century, the powerful viewed slavery and bound labor as methods to discipline the lower orders just as much as they relied on them to organize systems of labor to maximize production and profit, or as social systems that aggrandized would-be planters and patriarchs.¹¹

The size, scope, and purpose of both slavery and empire on the North American continent changed dramatically after 1650. Around mid-century, Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate and then the restored Stuart monarchs shunned the freelance privateers,

adventurers, and religious malcontents who had dominated early English attempts at colonization. In their place, Cromwell and the Stuarts sought to establish permanent colonial settlements in the Caribbean and North America to serve a host of imperial, domestic, and ideological needs. Older settlements and the new colonies established by Cromwell and the Stuarts would be more directly under the control and protection of the English state and expected to generate revenue. They would also be more heavily dependent on the labor of enslaved Africans. The scope, purpose, and location of these settlements also led to a host of imperial rivalries and borderland conflicts involving Native American nations, Spanish and French imperialists, and enslaved African-Americans capable of flight and rebellion. In English and then British North America, imperial rivalries and borderland threats would lead to the tremendous expansion of empire and slavery.¹²

From the 1650s through the Seven Years War, English and then British imperial policy supported both the territorial expansion of its empire in North America and the growth of slavery. Commercial wars against the Dutch in the 1650s and 1660s allowed English merchants to muscle their way into the lucrative trade in slaves and slave-produced cash crops, giving imperial officials a vested interest in overseeing slavery's growth in North America. Commerce related to slavery—whether the slave trade itself, the production and transportation of cash crops, or the provisioning of Caribbean slave colonies by the empire's mainland colonies—soon accounted for the bulk of economic activity in Britain's Atlantic empire. Likewise, customs duties on slave-produced crops and the slave trade provided a significant source of revenue for the Crown. And while would-be planters and merchants constantly fought for favored access to the power and resources of the British Atlantic empire, imperial policy and expanding Atlantic commercial networks generally met planter and merchant expectations that the British imperial state would support efforts to expand and secure colonies dependent on the use of slave labor. Planters and would-be planters in British North America would enjoy unparalleled state support for their efforts to establish slave-based economies, access to the colonial Atlantic World's preeminent empire for slavery, and a measure of autonomy that allowed them to develop and govern their slave societies as they saw fit.¹³

Britain's mainland slave colonies, then, developed within an empire that provided ample financial, military, social, legal, and economic support for merchants, planters, and officials who sought to establish or consolidate colonies dependent on the labor of enslaved Africans. Imperial policies cultivated the growth of plantation economies in North American borderlands by offering generous land grants to would-be planters with capital and labor. State-financed negotiations, treaties, gifts, and trade provided temporary borderland peace with Native Americans. With the royal family and other leading imperial officials heavily invested in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, imperial policy facilitated the transformation of mixed, coerced labor for whites, blacks, and Indians into the permanent enslavement of Africans and their descendants. Dependent on custom duties, the Crown promoted the production of slave-produced cash crops through bounties, while the empire provided ready markets—whether in the Caribbean or in London—for staples, stores, and cash crops. Imperial officials also supported efforts to establish new borderland colonies such as the Carolinas and then Georgia to protect established cash-crop-producing colonies. When war threatened to disrupt trans-Atlantic trade or to destroy fragile borderland slave societies, imperial officials

used naval resources to protect trans-Atlantic commerce and military resources to defend colonial slave societies that were most vulnerable to invasion and slave rebellion. In the slave colonies of British North America, offices, titles, and positions of authority went exclusively to the planter class, legitimizing their position at the pinnacle of colonial society while facilitating access to imperial officials and influential London merchants who directed the use of state power and commerce in the empire. Finally, the empire provided a racial and legal system that deemed slaves chattel property while permitting colonial planters to devise racialized and gendered slave codes most suitable to their local circumstances.¹⁴

Imperial support and access to a commercial empire centered on slavery meant that slavery, sovereignty, and empire would develop in dramatically different ways in the French, Spanish, and British dominions of North America. Initial state support for the fledgling French colony of Louisiana resulted in the rapid expansion of slavery and the consolidation of planter and state authority. From 1719 through 1731, the French Company of the Indies transported between 6,000 and 7,000 African slaves to Louisiana, a place where no independent slave trader would go given the distance, cost, and risk. The Company also built the infrastructure to support commerce and a plantation economy, while the French imperial state transported white servants and soldiers, provided land grants to planters, subsidies for tobacco, and the *Code Noir*'s legal structure for a plantation regime. But in 1729, Natchez Indians, angered by French incursions on their territory and autonomy, attacked the plantation settlement at Natchez. The Natchez Indians killed the majority of French officials and settlers, and killed or kidnapped Natchez's African slaves. The plantation settlements north of New Orleans collapsed, and the already fragile plantation regime throughout Louisiana weakened further. When the bankruptcy of the Company in 1731 led to crown control, French imperial officials and merchants nearly abandoned their colony in the lower Mississippi Valley. After 1731, Louisiana officials and planters exercised almost complete autonomy in governing their colony. Planters also had access to slaves through purchase from French and British ports in the Caribbean, and access to Caribbean markets for the sale of provisions to islands dependent on sugar monoculture. But French imperial officials proved unwilling to invest anything more than the barest of resources in Louisiana. With hostile Native American nations and Spanish and British colonies surrounding Louisiana, African slaves successfully resisted forced submission to the harsh discipline of a plantation regime. While France continued to claim dominion over the entire Mississippi Valley, it never again controlled anything more than New Orleans and its immediate hinterland. Likewise, plantation slavery languished; in 1750 there were fewer than 5,000 slaves in French Louisiana; in 1770, there were fewer than 6,000. It would not be until the 1780s, when Spanish officials placed the resources of the state at the disposal of Louisiana's would-be planters, that a plantation regime and a modicum of effective imperial sovereignty would emerge in the Mississippi Valley.¹⁵

Meanwhile, in Spanish Florida, white settlers lacked reliable access to the slave trade and imperial officials evinced little interest in developing a plantation economy. Spanish imperial policy instead sought to maintain St. Augustine as a strategic military post, to force Native Americans into mission towns, and to undermine the British Empire in North America by attacking slavery in South Carolina and Georgia. While Spain claimed titular sovereignty over a vast swath of the southeast, the refusal

of Spanish officials to provide anything more than nominal support for the defense of St. Augustine allowed a half-century of Native American and Carolinian raids into the southeast borderlands to confine effective Spanish sovereignty to St. Augustine and its immediate hinterlands. It would not be until Britain took possession of East and West Florida in the 1760s that slavery and a degree of effective imperial sovereignty began to grow there. The inability or unwillingness of French and Spanish officials to place the powers of the state at the disposal of would-be planters meant that slavery and effective imperial sovereignty languished in Spanish and French North America.

Intervention by the British imperial state, on the other hand, led to the rapid expansion and consolidation of colonial sovereignty and slavery in the Chesapeake, the Carolinas, and Georgia. In 1650, there were perhaps 1,500 African slaves in New England, New Amsterdam, and the Chesapeake. In 1700, the population of African slaves in British North America was approaching 30,000. By 1750, slavery was firmly entrenched in British colonies stretching from the Chesapeake to the Georgia frontier. In the following two decades—the height of the British empire in North America—the enslaved population nearly doubled from 245,000 to approximately 460,000 while effective British sovereignty extended into the Appalachians. Further illustrating the role of the British Empire in fostering the growth of slavery in colonial North America, there were seven times as many African slaves in Britain's northern colonies in 1770 (47,000) than there were in Florida and Louisiana (7,000).¹⁶

II

At the end of the Seven Years War the colonies of British North America seemed secure, stable, and primed to expand into the interior of the North American continent and the newly won colonies of East and West Florida. Many colonial subjects—especially in the southern colonies—fully expected that the British Empire would continue to grant them a large degree of autonomy while devoting the resources of the British imperial and commercial state to the expansion of both slavery and effective sovereignty into the borderlands.

Those colonial subjects would be profoundly disappointed. Beginning in 1763, Parliament, the Crown, and imperial officials undertook a host of measures to centralize their immense and decentralized North American empire. Imperial efforts to better govern Britain's sprawling North American empire had little to do with slavery directly. Instead, British officials sought to govern more effectively a motley, sprawling collection of colonies and narrow-minded provincials who had proved themselves incapable of governing themselves and respecting the broader interests of the Empire. Nonetheless, the host of measures adopted by imperial officials to govern the empire more effectively instead seemed to attack the interests of planters while undermining their mastery over slaves as persons, their sovereignty over slavery as a provincial institution, and their right to govern their colonies as they saw fit.¹⁷

The Proclamation of 1763 cut off planters from new western lands, while Indian policy now seemed to favor Native Americans over planter-speculators. The *Somerset Decision* (1772) seemed to condemn slavery's existence in the empire and suggested that Parliament and British courts—rather than planters and colonial governments—could determine a slave's legal status. Changing economic and monetary regulations

avored British merchants against colonial planters who had devised ingenious measures to exempt land and slaves from British merchants seeking to collect on their debts. By vetoing colonial efforts to regulate the slave trade, the Crown claimed control of an important aspect of the institution from local planters. Meanwhile, the Intolerable Acts demonstrated that Parliament assumed its right to dispense with colonial elites altogether, an utterly intolerable situation to southern planters who believed that local control of their colonies was both a right and a necessity. In 1774 and 1775, planter doubts about the viability of remaining in the British Empire spread rapidly in the wake of widespread rumors that British officials planned to free and arm slaves to put down the colonial rebellion. Lord Dunmore's November 1775 proclamation confirmed these rumors, accelerating the movement towards independence in the southern colonies. Independent of Dunmore's proclamation, slave unrest grew throughout the colonies with the ongoing conflict between their colonial and imperial masters. Overall, the host of measures designed to reform the empire after 1763 instead seemed to undermine planters' autonomy and mastery in personal, provincial, and imperial realms; a British empire that once seemed to serve the interests of planters now seemed to conspire against them.¹⁸

By 1775, then, independence from the British Empire became a necessity for many southern elites for two reasons that involved slavery. First, British imperial officials now threatened to use the powers of the imperial state to confine and disrupt slavery in the colonies rather than using it to expand and protect the institution, as they had done in the past. At the same time, colonial planter elites feared that their continued presence in the British Empire would soon result in the loss of their autonomy and mastery: their power to govern their slaves and their colonies as they saw fit. Taken collectively, British actions seemed to herald a reversal of the previous century's imperial policy on slavery, expansion, and colonial self-government by a planter elite. When moving for independence, aggrieved southern planters looked—not just to the future—but to a somewhat imagined past where they had enjoyed a modicum of equality within the British empire, a measure of influence over imperial decision-making when it involved provincial interests, and a large degree of independence to govern their slaves and colonies. While a bewildering variety of motives drove the movement for independence in each colony, uniting them was a desire to regain the autonomy and right to self-government within the broader British Empire that Patriots claimed they had enjoyed in the past. For southern planters, that meant the right to govern their slave societies as they saw fit. It also meant that any larger union that they were a part of would recognize their equality and autonomy while providing them with the support necessary to grow, protect, and govern their slave societies.¹⁹

Historians have rightfully focused on the profound changes that independence and revolution unleashed in the United States, on the North American continent, and in the Atlantic World. But in the long history of American slavery, continuity in the underlying forces that drove the expansion of empire and slavery over the previous century prevailed over the social, political, and economic changes that followed American independence and revolution. The history of the British Empire in North America from the 1650s through 1770 was characterized by the rapid expansion and consolidation of colonial slavery, local autonomy, and imperial sovereignty. Provincial planter elites—heavily dependent on access to the British Empire and the

use of state power to protect slavery—drove expansion and consolidation largely in response to the demands of Atlantic markets and borderland threats emanating from Native American nations and confederacies, potentially rebellious slaves, and rival imperial powers. Similarly, the history of the United States from independence through the American Civil War would be marked by the rapid expansion of American sovereignty and slavery, along with a large measure of local autonomy, into the borderlands of the North American continent. Much of this expansion and consolidation would be driven by a more powerful, more autonomous planter class who deployed state power to protect slavery from borderland threats. Politically dominated by slaveholders, an independent United States would continue the practices, processes, and political structures that had fed the vast expansion of empire and slavery over the previous century.²⁰

The rapid expansion of slavery, empire, and effective sovereignty under an independent United States would be accelerated by two important factors that shaped the broader histories of slavery and sovereignty in the Atlantic World and on the North American continent from the 1750s through the 1850s. First, the United States gained independence within a long series of borderland and imperial conflicts on the North American continent between the Seven Years War and the War of 1812. From a long continental and imperial perspective, the main effect of the American War for Independence was to intensify the borderland conflicts and imperial rivalries that were endemic in eastern North America from the 1660s through the 1760s. American independence added another imperial power to the North American continent; it freed white settler groups from the imperial restraints that had kept them out of the trans-Appalachian West; and it encouraged new alliances between Native Americans and Spanish and British imperial officials who possessed a common interest in checking the expansion of the United States. Second, American independence added new ideological and racial dimensions to borderland conflicts and the struggle for continental supremacy. White colonists understood the imperial conflicts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a struggle that pitted liberty, embodied by the Protestant British Empire, against tyranny and despotism, embodied by Catholic France and Spain. American independence shifted popular understandings of these imperial struggles and borderland conflicts in important ways, increasingly framing them in terms that pitted white republicans of the New World against European monarchists and their black and Native American allies.²¹

From the 1760s through the 1810s, the trans-Appalachian West, the Gulf Coast, and the Mississippi Valley were heavily contested imperial, racial, and ideological borderlands. In those borderlands, Native Americans nations, white settler groups, and African-American slaves contributed to intensified imperial rivalries where Britain, France, Spain, and the United States sought to maintain, regain, expand, and consolidate their dominions on the North American continent. These powers forged something like an imperial settlement in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, but peace proved temporary, especially for slaveholders in the United States. The breakup of the Spanish empire in the 1810s created new republics such as Mexico and Texas, and strengthened Indian confederations, including the Comanche Confederation. From the 1810s through the 1840s, struggles between Comanche raiders, Anglo-Texan slaveholders, and Mexican federalists and centralists produced chronic instability in the Texas–Mexico–Comancheria borderlands. This drew the attention

of American officials who feared that instability in the borderlands of the dissolved Spanish empire invited British expansion—especially if it offered Britain an opportunity to undermine the United States. At the same time, the great slave rebellion on Saint Domingue in the 1790s, a series of slave revolts in the British Caribbean beginning in the 1810s, and the abolition of slavery in the British Caribbean in the 1830s created an entirely new set of maritime borderlands inhabited by a nation born in a slave rebellion and a mighty empire that had abolished slavery within its own dominions and pushed for emancipation elsewhere.²²

From independence through the Mexican War, the multiplicity of threats emanating from Native Americans, and from European powers still harboring imperial ambitions in North America, amplified slaveholders' fears that the American Union was susceptible to externally exacerbated sectional, regional, and racial divisions. The supposed eagerness of Britain and France to incite slave rebellions as a means to destroy the United States and its booming trade in slave-produced commodities only added to these fears. Fearful American planters saw jealous imperial rivals supposedly stirring up trouble with Native Americans, African-American slaves, and white settler groups in the expanding borderlands of the United States. Those planters would repeatedly use the powers of the federal government to establish effective American control wherever American sovereignty remained weak and contested, and wherever they feared that imperial rivals encouraged slave rebellion and flight along the margins of the empire forged by the United States. As had happened under the British Empire, challenges to slaveholder mastery and sovereignty in borderlands frequently involved slaves as both property and as potential agents of rebellion. Likewise, largely autonomous borderland slaveholders in places such as Georgia, Natchez, Louisiana, and Texas called on the federal government to back their efforts to assert American sovereignty in the borderlands and to prevent slave flight and rebellion. Like their British predecessors, American territorial officials and the federal government answered slaveholders demands.²³

At least until the Mexican War, however, slaveholders did not possess some grand vision for creating an empire for slavery. Instead, the difficulty of securing property in slaves in the midst of larger geopolitical struggles, Native American resistance to expansion, and the ever-present threat of slave flight, theft, and rebellion created a seemingly never-ending series of borderland crises from the 1770s through the 1840s. American officials and policymakers responded to these crises in a haphazard, piecemeal fashion, much like their British predecessors. Slave flight and the theft of slaves illustrates how these processes played out. Slave escape invariably led to demands that state power be used to recover runaways and to prevent the flight of others in the future. State sovereignty was predicated, in part at least, on the ability of the state to secure the property of its subjects or citizens. Indeed, American slaveholders could not imagine American sovereignty apart from security for their property in slaves; the two were synonymous in their minds. Accordingly, the federal government repeatedly faced demands that its powers be deployed to protect property in slaves from flight, theft, and rebellion in the areas where it remained most vulnerable: the borderlands between rival empires, and in the emerging borderlands between slavery and freedom. While slave flight and theft, along with fears of rebellion, continued largely unabated in nearly every borderland where slavery existed from independence through the Civil War, a few examples illustrate the broader processes that led to the expansion of both slavery and sovereignty under an independent United States.²⁴

Throughout the southern backcountry, borderland skirmishes and raids that began with the Seven Years War continued largely unabated through the Imperial Crisis, the War for Independence, and into the 1790s. By then, Native American warriors who raided white settlements had adopted the practice of killing whites while systematically targeting blacks for capture. Native American warriors found ready buyers for black captives in Indian nations, in white settlers unconcerned about title, and in merchants who resold the captives in Natchez, Spanish Louisiana and West Florida, and as far away as Cuba. At the same time, slaves themselves fled for freedom in the confused borderlands of the Southeast. The owners of captured and fleeing slaves turned to the state for relief. As one Georgian planter complained mere months after Congress met for the first time in 1789, “the present situation of this Country from the depredations of the *Indians* on one quarter—& the insidious protection afforded the *Spaniards* to our run away Negroes on the other—are of so alarming & serious a nature—as to threaten this flourishing State with ruin and depopulation, unless timely protected by Congress!” In response to demands such as these, American territorial, Indian, and military officials devoted much of their official business to pleading with Native Americans to recognize the sovereignty of the United States. Demonstrating the relationship between slavery, sovereignty, and stability for slavery, nearly every treaty negotiated with Native Americans in this period included a clause requiring them to “deliver . . . negroes, and property taken” from American citizens. More broadly, from the 1790s through the 1850s, Congress repeatedly appropriated funds to pay bounties to Native Americans who returned slaves claimed by American citizens, to reimburse American citizens who lost property in slaves to Indian raids and wars, to pay for slave rendition expeditions into Florida, and to station the US military in the borderlands where property in slaves remained most vulnerable. In the process, the borderlands of slavery and sovereignty became bordered lands where the sovereignty of the United States and property in slaves became more secure in law if not always in practice.²⁵

In other borderlands, slaves quickly recognized that nearby territories offered at least the potential for freedom. When William C.C. Claiborne arrived to govern Louisiana in 1804, he immediately encountered angry French planters whose slaves had fled to New Spain in response to rumors that the Spanish promised freedom for any slave who made it out of American Louisiana. Claiborne needed to placate angry French planters wary of slavery’s future under the United States, and to prevent those slaveholders—now American citizens—from launching an independent slave recovery excursion into New Spain. Claiborne hastily began negotiating with Spanish authorities for the slaves’ return, and this eventually led to three-way negotiations between Spanish officials, the United States, and Caddo Indians. Over the next five years, Claiborne and other American officials devoted much of their time to negotiating with Spanish authorities and Caddo Indians to prevent the continuing flight of Louisiana slaves into disputed territory, where their presence threatened to set off an international incident between Spain and the United States. The result was the “Neutral Ground” borderland between Louisiana, Caddo Territory, and New Spain, along with Spanish and Caddo commitments to return runaway slaves. Claiborne’s efforts had turned a borderland into a bordered land, in the process consolidating American sovereignty and providing greater security for Louisiana slaveholders, and setting the stage for future claims to “re-annex” Texas. Slaveholders in borderlands

elsewhere feared slave flight, slave rebellion, and the theft of slaves by Native American warriors, rival imperial powers, and white settlers. They too fully expected the state to address the loss of slaves and prevent slave rebellion. In the process, borderlands became bordered lands; the once contested sovereignty of the United States ultimately prevailed; and property in slaves became more secure.²⁶

Andrew Jackson's actions in the War of 1812 and his subsequent invasions of Spanish West Florida further illustrates how slaveholders used state power to consolidate slavery and sovereignty. During the war, Jackson defeated and scattered the Red Sticks (who had long stood accused of stealing slaves) and then forced a massive land cession on the Creeks to secure the Georgia backcountry. He also defended Louisiana from an invasion where it was fully expected that the British would incite a slave rebellion, and where slaves were already suspected of conspiring to rebel and flee to Choctaw territory. Jackson's wartime pursuits reflected his longstanding concerns that agents of British monarchy and imperialism—assisted by savage Indians and rebellious slaves—would destroy slavery, American sovereignty, and white male mastery in the southern borderlands.

Jackson's wartime victories drove the immediate threats to American sovereignty and slavery out of titular American territory and into Spanish West Florida, where Jackson set his post-war sights. Jackson justified his invasion of Florida by his obligation to protect American sovereignty and slavery from the “savage foe” and the “lawless band of negro brigands” who found shelter in Florida and support from British and Spanish imperialists. Jackson subsequently sought to recover runaway slaves; to capture or destroy bands of fugitive blacks; to chastise Native Americans who permitted blacks to find refuge in Florida; to hang British merchants who supplied “Negroes and Indians;” and, finally, to destroy the growing “Negro Fort” that promised to become a massive maroon settlement threatening the southern interior's new and fragile plantation regime. Jackson's wartime actions and subsequent invasions of West Florida placed the southeast borderlands that had been heavily contested since the Seven Years War squarely under American rule. With European powers driven out of the southeast, and with Native American nations weakened by the War of 1812 and its aftermath, slaveholders would use the powers of the federal government to acquire Spanish Florida, for Indian removal, and in the long Seminole Wars in Florida. The same imperatives that drove Jackson first as a general and then as president would later lead to Texas Annexation and the Mexican War. More broadly still, the same underlying processes that drove the expansion of slavery and sovereignty in British North America—slaveholders using state power to protect borderland slave societies from imperial rivals, their Native American allies, and potentially rebellious slaves—intensified after the United States joined in the struggle for imperial control of North America.²⁷

Accelerating slavery's great expansion under the United States even further, American independence came during a period when demand for slave-produced commodities increased at an unprecedented rate, and just as the Atlantic plantation complex's eighteenth-century core began to unravel. Atlantic slavery began its greatest period of growth in the 1760s, and the trans-Atlantic slave trade peaked with over 700,000 slaves sold into the Americas in each decade between the 1780s and the 1810s. After the Seven Years War, growing Atlantic demand for sugar, coffee, tobacco, and cotton produced a broad, hemispheric trend that saw more slaves,

producing more cash crops, in places that were marginal to the eighteenth-century Atlantic plantation complex. The Seven Years War, the American War for Independence, the great slave rebellion on Saint Domingue, and the wars of the French Revolution repeatedly disrupted growing trans-Atlantic commerce in slaves and commodities. These disruptions, however, failed to reverse the larger trend of expanding empires, forcing more slaves to produce more cash crops in newly settled regions. Likewise, slave rebellion and emancipation in the French and then British Caribbean simply encouraged planters elsewhere to accelerate the expansion of plantation operations in places such as Spanish Cuba and in the once-peripheral borderlands of the North American continent, including the southern interior, the Gulf South, and the Lower Mississippi Valley. Broad, long-term trends and processes—continuing borderland conflicts and imperial rivalries, autonomous planters using the powers of the imperial state to shore up and expand slavery, and growing Atlantic demand for slave produced commodities—all meant that slavery, sovereignty, and empire would continue to expand together under an independent United States, much as they had in Britain's North American empire in the previous century.²⁸

But if American independence produced significant continuities it also contributed to significant changes that would challenge empires for slavery throughout the Atlantic world. At the turn of the eighteenth-century, diverse and diffused antislavery groups began cohering into a trans-Atlantic, Anglo-American antislavery movement. When white colonists used a natural rights philosophy to oppose British measures during the Imperial Crisis, they inadvertently unleashed a powerful ideological basis for opposing slavery that joined once diffused religious and Enlightenment reservations against slavery. At the same time, the division of the British Empire in the 1780s, soon followed by the wars of the French Revolution, challenged some Britons to reconsider slavery's place in a reconfigured British empire. The French Revolution added another powerful ideological dimension to growing trans-Atlantic antislavery movements, while the massive slave uprising on Saint Domingue demonstrated that slaves could overturn slave societies when the master class was divided. The great imperial crises that shook the French, Spanish, and British empires from the 1770s through the 1820s also created a series of free soil borderlands that gave slaves, free blacks, and their allies a place from which they could attack slavery in word and deed.²⁹

Like the century that preceded it, the century stretching from the Seven Years War to the American Civil War would be an age of empires and slavery; but it would also become an age of antislavery movements, emancipation, and abolition. The great expansion of antislavery and abolitionist movements, including the abolition of slavery in the northern states and in much of the Caribbean, would add an important antislavery element to the borderland conflicts and imperial rivalries that had been intensifying on the North American continent since the Seven Years War. From the 1780s through the Civil War, as slaves, states, and empires abolished slavery in every region surrounding the southern states, southern slaveholders found themselves surrounded by potentially hostile powers, free black and enslaved agents of abolition, and free soil borderlands that invited slave flight. Though slavery and sovereignty would continue to advance together in the nineteenth century, their advance would be more contentious, more heavily contested, and more rife with conflict.

Southern slaveholders understood that antislavery ideologies and movements most menaced slavery in borderlands when slaves, abolitionists, and antislavery groups had access to state power and protection from cross border rivals. From the 1780s onwards, these groups would use state power to abolish or prohibit slavery's expansion across a vast swath of the North American continent. Antislavery ideologies and the disruptions introduced by the War for Independence allowed northern slaves and whites to begin the process of abolition in the northern states, a process that was largely complete by 1820. Meanwhile, from the 1780s through the 1810s, white settler groups in the Northwest gained control of their territorial governments and then worked with antislavery allies in Congress to prohibit slavery in Ohio, Indiana, and to insure its extra-legality in Illinois. The abolition of slavery in the northern states and its legal ban from the old Northwest turned the region stretching from Pennsylvania to the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers into a vast borderland where slaveholders' mastery and sovereignty would be frequently challenged.

Those free-soil borderlands both invited slave flight and encouraged criticism of the South's increasingly peculiar institution. Freedom was by no means assured for blacks who fled north, but free state whites frequently resented the intrusion of armed slavecatchers more than they disliked the presence of free blacks and fugitive slaves. In addition, free and enslaved blacks, along with well-meaning whites, violently resisted slavecatchers' efforts to recover fugitive slaves, won a growing number of freedom claims by relying on the free states' legal status as free soil in the 1810s and 1820s, and impelled select northern states to pass personal liberty laws in the 1840s. When southern slaveholders forced a new fugitive slave law through Congress in 1850, northern blacks and their white allies grew even more militant in their demands that southern laws on the rendition of fugitive slaves were null and void in the free territory of the northern states. Territorial expansion created additional borderland conflicts between slavery and freedom. Northern whites had fought against slavery's expansion on and off since the 1780s. In 1820 those actions and ideologies came to a head when a broad coalition from the North sought to impose a plan of gradual emancipation on Missouri and to exclude slavery from all states and territories “hereafter admitted to the union.” The Missouri Controversy demonstrated that the northern states could be an imperialistic antislavery rival for control of the North American continent: a rival that would readily use federal power to confine slavery to its present limits, to enlarge the dominion of free white labor, and to force gradual abolition on unwilling whites in borderland slave societies.³⁰

Rebellion and abolition in the Caribbean created additional borderland problems for slaveholders. The Saint Domingue rebellion was only the first in a series of revolts that struck the Caribbean. Revolts in Barbados, Demerara, and Jamaica in the early nineteenth century came immediately after Parliament debated abolitionist petitions. Planters in the United States watched these events closely, drawing immediate connections between political debates and slave rebellions. But while American slaveholders did their best to suppress abolitionism at home, they could do nothing to retard emancipation in the British Caribbean. British emancipation in the 1830s created a new set of maritime borderlands where an independent black republic and British imperialists sat offshore from the Atlantic and Gulf Coast slave states. By the 1830s, slaveholders feared that Britain would use its emancipated Caribbean islands and Haiti as recruiting grounds for black soldiers, who would then be used

to invade the southern states and incite a massive slave uprising. By the late 1830s, southern slaveholders saw themselves increasingly threatened by antislavery movements at home and by the Caribbean's free black emissaries of abolition, with both groups allegedly backed by all the might of the British Empire.³¹

III

In the early 1840s, however, the most immediate borderland threat to American slavery abruptly shifted from the Caribbean to Texas, as leading southern statesmen drew a straight line from British abolition in the Caribbean to alleged British interest in creating a free-labor Texas. Southern politicians as diverse as Robert Walker, John Tyler, and John Calhoun now alleged that British imperialists would use a free, British-allied Texas to organize Native Americans, emancipated Texas slaves, and runaway American slaves into an invasion force that would lay waste to American slavery from Louisiana to Virginia. Slaveholder expansionists responded to this newest borderland threat by adopting an aggressive, proslavery imperialism that sought Texas annexation and the acquisition of northern Mexico to the Pacific. In justifying annexation and acquisition, expansionists relied on old borderland and imperial concerns about British meddling with Native Americans and African slaves. They also joined these to new notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority and the redemption of the remainder of the continent still in the hands of Native Americans, Spaniards, and Mestizos. According to both northern and southern expansionists, racially inferior Native Americans and Mexicans who fought the devastating "War of a Thousand Deserts" in northern Mexico over the previous two decades had decimated the once bountiful region. In contrast, US expansion to the Pacific would secure slavery in the United States while allowing for racially superior Anglo-Saxons to bring peace and civilization to the teeming wilderness of northern Mexico, just as American slaveholders in Texas had allegedly done over the previous two decades. Expansion to the Pacific would also insure that Mexican California—which had become independent for all practical purposes in the 1840s—would fall under American rather than British jurisdiction.³²

Victory in the US–Mexican War confirmed the United States position as the continent's dominant imperial power, seemingly settling the former borderland conflicts and imperial struggles that had pitted the republican United States against the monarchical British and the weak American republics under their influence. Increasingly, however, notions of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority and "manifest destiny" enjoyed pride of place in both northern and southern visions of an expanding American empire. And though white northerners and southerners agreed on Anglo-Saxon superiority and the United States' destiny in the broader Americas, they disagreed profoundly about the place of racial slavery in their visions of an expanding American empire. Consequently, in the 1850s the United States became an empire increasingly divided by antagonistic imperial visions for the broader Americas.³³

At the same time, a new host of borderland threats seemed to challenge slaveholder mastery over slaves and blacks as persons and their sovereignty over slavery as an institution from within the Union. Northern resistance to the rendition of fugitive slaves, free and enslaved blacks' more assertive challenges to slavery, Bleeding Kansas and John Browne's raid, and the emergence of a Republican Party that sought to

divorce the federal government from slavery while halting its expansion all pointed in dangerous directions for slaveholders who had grown accustomed to the use of state power to maintain racial subordination and slavery, especially in the borderlands. Just as white northerners and southerners disagreed over the place of slavery in an expanding continental empire, they also disagreed over the degree to which the federal government was obligated to protect slavery, the property rights of slaveholders, and the racial order on which southern society rested. At their core, the great sectional conflicts of the 1850s would center on the place of racial slavery in the United States’ advancing empire. It also centered on the proper use of state power to protect slaveholders’ rights and interests, especially in the numerous borderlands between slavery and freedom that had proliferated in the 1840s and the 1850s.³⁴

Thus, in the 1850s, slaveholders’ sought “*perfect security* for slavery” from the numerous borderland, sectional, and partisan challenges to slavery that had multiplied and grown ever more threatening since the US–Mexican War. Among other things, “perfect security” meant a strengthened Fugitive Slave Law that would use the coercive and legal might of the federal government to ensure that slave state law on the capture and rendition of fugitive slaves prevailed throughout the Union. “Perfect security” also required repeal of the Missouri Compromise and the use of federal power to force slavery into borderland territories such as Kansas, which were only marginally suitable for slavery, and where the majority of the white population opposed it. Once the *Dred Scott* decision opened all federal territories to slavery, slaveholders sought a federal territorial slave code that would again use state power to provide “perfect security” for slavery in the territorial borderlands of the far West, while promising that slavery would follow the flag into any territories acquired by the Union in the future. By the late 1850s, leading southern statesmen who followed the logic of the *Dred Scott* decision expected that the Supreme Court would next rule that Free State bans on slavery violated slaveholders’ Fifth Amendment property rights, granting slaveholders unfettered rights throughout the Union. The *Dred Scott* decision, too, promised to preserve the racial order against Black Republicans who allegedly sought to overturn the racial subordination on which slavery rested. With these measures, “perfect security for slavery” would prevail in the Free states and in the borderlands between slavery and freedom as the sovereignty, laws, and racial order of the slave states would reign supreme through the entire Union.³⁵

The domestic measures sought by slaveholders in the 1850s—in effect, the nationalization of slavery through the imposition of slaveholders property rights and slave state sovereignty and law on the Free states and federal territories—seem novel and extreme. But in many ways this was simply a continuation of slaveholders’ long-standing efforts to use state power to provide “perfect security for slavery” wherever it seemed threatened. The extremes of slaveholders’ demands in the 1850s were simply their response to the proliferation of free soil borderlands and antislavery groups, movements, political parties, and imperial rivals since the 1840s. Indeed, the “perfect security for slavery” that they demanded from northern whites and the federal government in the 1850s differed little from what they had sought from Native American nations, imperial rivals, and imperial governments over the previous two centuries: protection for their property in slaves and access to state power to maintain mastery and racial subordination. As their predecessors had done on the North American continent for the better part of two centuries, the most aggressive

southern sectionalists of the 1850s simply sought to turn borderlands into bordered lands where slaveholder mastery and sovereignty—backed by state power—would prevail. The main difference between the 1850s and previous decades was that now, the greatest threats to slavery came from whites within the Union, rather than from slaves, Native Americans, or rival imperialists from without.

The same concerns about proliferating free soil borderlands and antislavery sectional and imperial rivals directed foreign policy in the 1850s. Fears that Britain would impel Spain to abolish slavery in Cuba—placing another hostile threat to American slavery in the Caribbean—furthered an imperial vision of slavery’s “natural development” through rapid expansion into the South’s Caribbean borderlands. By the late 1850s, leading spokesmen for southern sectionalism increasingly asserted that the South had become a distinct imperial power, separate from the northern states and destined by race to conquer the tropics. The domestic and foreign measures they sought, while largely a continuation of their efforts to use state power to protect slavery from borderland threats, were now underwritten by a self-consciously proslavery imperialism that demanded aggressive expansion and consolidation, not only to protect slavery and slaveholders but also to bring the benefits of racial slavery to the broader Americas.³⁶

The demands that slaveholders had unleashed on the North since Texas annexation catalyzed once diffused notions of free labor into a cohesive free labor and free soil ideology. In turn, the proponents of free labor would develop a free soil imperialism that was as aggressive and as dependent on state power as the South’s vision of an empire for slavery. In challenging the South’s invasion of free Kansas, William Seward promised slaveholding imperialists that the North’s free labor insurgency “will henceforth meet you boldly and resolutely here [in Washington]; it will meet you everywhere, in the Territories and out of them, wherever you may go to extend slavery. It has driven you back in California and in Kansas, it will invade you soon in Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Missouri, and Texas. It will meet you in Arizona, in Central America, and even in Cuba.” For free soil imperialists such as Seward, the “expansion of the empire of free white men” would be realized through government “intervention in favor of free labor and free States.” Free soil imperialism—like all imperialisms—would be heavily dependent on the use of state power. State power and the federal government’s vast reserves of western land would foster the development of railroads that would connect the “naturally” free soil west with markets in the East and ports on the Pacific. State power would grant 160-acre homesteads in territories where Native Americans would be removed by federal power and slavery would be excluded by federal law. State power would also be used to fund voluntary emancipations in the border states and the transportation of free blacks to Central America (where, under the protection of the United States, they would be used to block both British and proslavery southern designs on Central America). Above all else, Republican control of the federal government promised that the powers of the state would no longer be used to prop up what Republicans saw as the greatest impediment to a free labor empire: the archaic, aristocratic, and naturally degenerative system of slavery in the South.³⁷

Ultimately, the sectional debates and conflicts that stretched from Texas annexation to the secession crisis of 1860–1 all came back to two questions. The first was an old one: How would state power be used to protect slavery in the borderlands,

to keep blacks in slavery, and to prop up the slaveholding classes and southern whites who were slavery’s main beneficiaries? The second question, this one emanating from the North, had devastating implications for slaveholders: Should state power be used to keep the United States on its present course down the “high-road to slave empire?” Or, should it now be used to forge a free soil empire that would provide no assistance to slaveholders beyond the minimal constitutional requirements found in the fugitive slave and three-fifths clauses, while containing slavery to its present borders and offering federal funding for state level emancipation coupled with colonization?

In the elections of 1860, northern voters answered those questions by electing a Republican president and a Republican majority in the House. Southern slaveholders now faced a situation that bore striking resemblances to the Imperial Crisis of the 1770s. From their foundings, both the British Empire and the United States government had acted—far more often than not—to protect and promote the interests of slaveholders. Slaveholders not only exercised a large degree of autonomy in governing their individual colonies and states, they also repeatedly used state power to protect slavery from borderland threats and to prop up the beneficiaries of slavery and racial subordination. By 1776, many southern slaveholders believed that the British empire had not only outlived its usefulness, but that it posed an active, hostile threat to slavery. By 1861, much the same seemed true of the United States.

“The new empire is at last fairly launched,” announced the *New York Times* as the seceding states formed the Confederacy in February 1861. After a decade of serving as *de facto* imperial rivals engaged in countless borderland disputes, the Union and the Confederacy did what imperial states on the North American continent had always done; they went to war. The Civil War would extend the borderlands of slavery and sovereignty deep into a Confederacy whose ability to use state power to maintain slavery and racial subordination was devastated by the demands of war. As Union armies invaded, conquered, and held Confederate territory, they created a multitude of new borderlands within the Confederacy itself. As had happened in so many previous imperial conflicts in North America, slaves fled to the borderlands created by invading armies and offered assistance in exchange for freedom. As Union wartime policy increasingly tied victory to the destruction of slavery, the Union employed state power to destroy slavery wherever invading Union armies and fleeing slaves created borderlands. Slaves and soldiers then turned those borderlands into bordered lands where their freedom would be upheld by state power. With that, slaves and soldiers began the process of destroying one of the longest running slave regimes in the Americas. Imperial rivalries had fastened chattel slavery on the North American continent; an imperial rivalry would also prove the institution’s undoing.³⁸

IV

A focus on the expansion of slavery and sovereignty challenges historians to rethink the periodizations, narratives, and dynamics of the larger saga of slavery’s growth, expansion, and demise in the Atlantic World and on the North American continent.³⁹ The independence of the United States and the American Revolution were simply moments—albeit crucial moments of change—in that larger saga. From the expansion of the English empire in North America that began in the 1660s through the American Civil War, political and geo-political conflicts in the borderlands of North

America were continuously shaped by struggles over the expansion and consolidation of both sovereignty and slavery, struggles that involved an ever-changing cast of empires, states, and colonies, white settler groups, Native Americans, and African-Americans. As historians continue to understand the significance of the American Revolution, they are increasingly seeking to untangle the myriad ways that the independence of the United States and the American Revolution figured into that saga in multiple, conflicting ways.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTES

- 1 Abraham Lincoln to William H. Seward, February 1, 1861 in Roy P. Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (4 vols., New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 4:183.
- 2 For an older historiography that focused almost exclusively on American political institutions and the interests of southern planters to explain slavery’s expansion, see Donald Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics, 1765–1820* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971); Don Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 74–113; Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of The United States Government’s Relations to Slavery*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); William W. Freehling, “The Founding Fathers and Conditional Antislavery,” in *The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Freehling, *Road to Disunion, Volume I: Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 138–143; Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001) 2nd ed. These interpretations of slavery expansion inform much of the more recent literature on slavery and politics. See, for example, the explanations given for slavery’s expansion in Douglas R. Egerton, “The Empire of Liberty Reconsidered,” in *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race, and the New Republic*, James Horn, Jan Ellen Lewis, and Peter S. Onuf, eds., (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 309–330; Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 17–38; Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Lacy K. Ford, “*Deliver Us from Evil*”: *The Slavery Question in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 112–140; George William Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders Union: Slavery, Politics, and the Constitution in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 211–223.
- 3 For two otherwise excellent works that are unduly focused on British North America and then the United States, see Christopher Tomlins, *Freedom Bound: Law, Labor, and Civic Identity in Colonizing English America, 1580–1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Aziz Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).
- 4 Rosemarie Zagarri, “The Significance of the ‘Global Turn’ for the Early American Republic: Globalization in the Age of Nation-Building,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 31 (Spring

2011), 1–37, quote at 6. Zagarri is especially helpful in distinguishing between the old and new forms of nationalist and exceptionalist historiography. As Zagarri notes, “whether celebratory or negative, however, both forms of exceptionalism result from the same basic premise: an approach that emphasizes the country’s separateness and distinctiveness as a nation-state rather than its connections to and similarities with the rest of the world.”

Quote at 6. For the limits of both nationalist and exceptionalist histories of the United States, see Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America’s Place in World History* (New York, 2006), 3–14; Johan N. Neem, “American Exceptionalism in a Global Age,” *History and Theory* 50 (Feb. 2011), 41–70.

- 5 Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Steven Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).
- 6 For recent works that analyze American slavery in wider imperial, Atlantic, and continental contexts, see David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Laird W. Bergad, *The Comparative Histories of Slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Robin Blackburn, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights* (London: Verso, 2011); John Craig Hammond, “Slavery, Settlement, and Empire: The Expansion and Growth of Slavery in the Interior of the North American Continent, 1770–1820,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 32 (Summer 2012), 175–206. Recent work on race and slavery in Native American nations has also been instructive in pointing historians towards the ubiquity of racial subordination and slavery in the Americas rather than the peculiarity of slavery in the United States. See, for example, Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).
- 7 Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*; Robert E. Bonner, *Mastering America: Southern Slaveholders and the Crisis of American Nationhood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3–78; David F. Ericson, *Slavery in the American Republic: Developing the Federal Government, 1791–1861* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011); Edward B. Rugemer, “Slave Rebels and Abolitionists: The Black Atlantic and the Coming of the Civil War,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 2 (June 2012): 179–202.
- 8 Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History,” *American Historical Review* 104 (June 1999): 814–841; Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); François Furstenberg, “The Significance of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier in Atlantic History,” *American Historical Review* 113 (June 2008): 647–677; Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011); Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012). The literature on empire is vast, rich, and sophisticated. For a review of “empire’s strange historiographic career” and its important uses to historians of the United States, see Paul A. Kramer, “Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World,” *American Historical Review* 116 (Dec. 2011): 1348–1391.
- 9 For borderlands as “sites of imperial rivalry,” and the transition from borderlands to “bordered lands” through the “power politics of territorial hegemony” see Adelman and Aron, “Borderlands to Borders.” For ways in which slaveholders’ mastery over slaves as person and sovereignty over slavery as an institution were repeatedly challenged in borderlands where differing regimes of slavery and freedom came into contact, see Stanley Harrold,

- Border War: Fighting over Slavery before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Richard S. Newman, "'Lucky to be born in Pennsylvania': Free Soil, Fugitive Slaves and the Making of Pennsylvania's Anti-Slavery Borderland," *Slavery & Abolition*, 32 (September 2011), 413–430; Ada Ferrer, "Haiti, Free Soil, and Antislavery in the Revolutionary Atlantic," *American Historical Review* 117 (Feb. 2012), 40–66.
- 10 For "titular" and "effective" sovereignty, see John Reda, "Joining the Union: Land, Race, and Sovereignty in the Illinois Country, 1763–1825" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2009). Historians have rightly emphasized the significant discontinuities and differences between the empires of Britain and the United States on the North American continent, and the significant changes that followed from American independence and revolution. But like Tomlins, *Freedom Bound*, and Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom*, this chapter argues that important continuities joined the two. Rana's and Tomlin's excellent work tends to minimize how conflicts in borderlands led to the expansion of both slavery and sovereignty. Furthermore, in these works, Native Americans and African-Americans too often become the subjects of white ideologies and the recipients of white actions rather than being analyzed as important historical agents in their own right.
- 11 For early European settlement, see Daniel Richter, *Before the Revolution: America's Ancient Pasts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 88–238. For slavery in the early Atlantic World and the transition from racially mixed, bound labor to permanent, racialized slavery and plantation production, see Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 48–140; Drescher, *Abolition*, 3–87; Blackburn, *American Crucible*; Tomlins, *Freedom Bound*, 1–331; Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 15–92. The arguments in this section are developed in greater detail in John Craig Hammond, "Slavery, Sovereignty, and Empires: North American Borderlands and the American Civil War, 1660–1860," *Journal of the Civil War Era* (June, 2014).
- 12 For the transformation of the English empire in the 1650s and 1660s, the important continuities that linked Cromwellian and Stuart expansion, and the central role of the state in establishing plantation societies in the Caribbean, see Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Atlantic in the Age of Revolution, 1640–1661* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Trevor Burnard, "The British Atlantic," in *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* ed. Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 111–136; Daniel Richter, *Before the Revolution: America's Ancient Pasts*, 230–256.
- 13 Russell Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 49–66; Richter, *Before the Revolution*, 230–264, 346–351; Tomlins, *Freedom Bound*, 420–504; Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 93–176; Gardena, *English Atlantic*, 183–212; Burnard, "British Atlantic."
- 14 William A. Pettigrew, "Free to Enslave: Politics and the Escalation of Britain's Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1688–1714," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser. 64 (January 2007): 3–38; John C. Coombs, "The Phases of Conversion: A New Chronology for the Rise of Slavery in Early Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser. 68 (July 2011): 332–360; Douglas Bradburn, "The Visible Fist: The Chesapeake Tobacco Trade in War and the Purpose of Empire, 1690–1715," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser. 68 (July 2011): 361–386; David Waldstriecker, *Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification* (New York: Hill and Wang 2009), 21–31; Van Cleve, *Slaveholders' Union*, 20–26; Menard, *Sweet Negotiations*; Bernard, "British Atlantic"; Richter, *Before the Revolution*, 230–264, 346–351; Tomlins, *Freedom Bound*, 420–504; Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 93–176; Gardena, *English Atlantic*, 183–212; Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth*, 48–78.
- 15 Hammond, "Slavery, Settlement, and Empire"; DuVal, *Native Ground*, 63–118; Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 77–92, 195–215.
- 16 The best comparative account of slavery in British, French, and Spanish North America is Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*. Population figures, Table I, 369–370. For the differences between

- colonial settlements in these three empires, see Richter, *Before the Revolution*, 212–238. For comparative accounts of slavery in the British, Spanish, French, and Portuguese empires, see Blackburn, *American Crucible*.
- 17 Jack P. Greene, *The Constitutional Origins of the American Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

DISSENTERS FROM THE MAINSTREAM

The National and International Dimensions of Evangelical Reform



Emily Conroy-Krutz

In 1832, a delegation of reform-minded British Congregationalists visited the United States, interested to report to their sponsors in England and Wales on the progress of religion and reform in America. They attended Anniversary Week in New York in May, when a wide range of reform groups came together to hold their annual meetings in a consolidated period of time to make travel easier for those who might be members of many such groups. The British visitors traveled to Boston, where they could see the movement of religious reform in that city. The Fourth of July found them in Cincinnati, watching the celebrations in the church of Dr. Lyman Beecher. This was, they explained to their readers in Britain, “almost the only holiday kept in America,” and they enjoyed watching the “grand fête” with the famous minister. For “obvious reasons” the British travelers did not go into the pulpit during these festivities. They did, however, secure a good seat and stayed through the entire proceedings, though the reader of the Declaration of Independence bothered them with the “rather bitter” tone he gave to the list of grievances. In spite of their British identity, they were welcome guests at this most patriotic of occasions, as indeed they were welcomed by American ministers and laypeople throughout their travels. As they toured the Northeast, these British delegates rubbed elbows with the leaders of American religion and reform, discussing slavery, temperance, education, missions, and the state of the West with Beecher and his peers.¹

This delegation was only one example of the transatlantic connections that American reformers, particularly those with religious motivations, had in the years of the early republic. Lyman Beecher is emblematic of the range of concerns—national and international—the religious reformers in this period attempted to address. As an active participant in the changes that transformed American evangelicalism, Beecher was at the center of religious life in the first decades of the century. He was a leader in the movements for temperance, a founder of the foreign mission movement, and, as President of Lane Seminary, attempted to bring New England culture to the West. Beecher was a good friend of Jeremiah Evarts, the leader of the opposition to Cherokee removal; it was through Evarts that Beecher’s oldest daughter Catharine would come to enlist American women in that cause. He was an important player on the American stage, and well-known enough abroad that the British

authors only referred to him by name throughout their text, never bothering to explain to their readers who this Dr. Beecher was. Chances are, they would have known already, for this was hardly the first time that reformers across the ocean had been in touch. Religious reformers on both sides of the Atlantic saw the world in similar ways, identified similar problems, and attempted to fix them with similar solutions. As the American nation expanded westward across the continent, reformers were thinking about the globe.

Alexis de Tocqueville famously reflected that when Americans “wish to highlight a truth or develop an opinion by the encouragement of a great example, they form an association.” This tendency to form voluntary associations was, in his mind, a uniquely American feature: “Where you see in France the government and in England a noble lord at the head of a great new initiative, in the United States you can count on finding an association.”² The extent and fervor of reform movements in the early republic does seem to have been an important component of American society. American reformers came together to end drinking, stop prostitution, evangelize non-Christians, distribute Bibles, spread literacy, abolish slavery, defend Native Americans, and more. By 1834, for example, the events in New York’s Anniversary Week included meetings of the Seamen’s Friend, Anti-Slavery, Tract, Peace, Bible, Colonization, Home Missionary, Foreign Missionary, Education, Seventh Commandment, Temperance, Infant Schools, and Sunday School Societies. Leaders of one group were frequently important in others, leading to the perception of a so-called “Benevolent Empire” in the early republic.³ The extent to which this was a uniquely American tendency, however, begs reexamination. American reformers worked within a global context. They responded to perceived problems throughout the world and corresponded with colleagues across the ocean.

For participants in the benevolent and reform movements of the early nineteenth century, there was much value in fostering and developing connections across the Atlantic. We can see these connections in the print culture, personal correspondence, and physical travel of reformers in America and Europe. Ideas as well as bodies crossed the ocean, providing a counterpoint to the continental focus of expansion. These reformers were inspired by a deep faith in Providence, and a belief that God worked through them. They were inspired, too, by a very real concern that their country was headed down the wrong path. Without their efforts to keep morality, religion, and indeed “civilization” present in both American society and the world at large, they assumed, terrible things would result. Among their concerns was the belief that the republic could not survive if it became an immoral space. More than this, though, they worried about issues that went well beyond national concerns. The stakes were high: what they worried about was nothing less than the salvation of souls and the survival of God’s kingdom on earth. Accordingly, as American reformers sought to improve their country, they also sought to improve the world. In missionary and reform movements, American reformers were affected by events both at home and abroad. At times, this could mean that reformers found solutions to American problems overseas; at other times, it could mean that they found opportunities to change the rest of the world in their own image.

Reformers had a complex relationship to their country. On the one hand, many of them embraced aspects of the nationalism that was developing over the first half of the nineteenth century. Like the supporters of Manifest Destiny, they felt that

America had a special role to play in world history. The difference was that reformers saw this destiny as demanding certain duties in turn; it could only be fulfilled if certain changes happened first and America acted as a moral example to the world. Reformers did not see expansion as necessarily beneficial; they saw perilous possibilities in the potential for disorder, for immorality, and for introducing inappropriate members into the body politic. At times, they identified more with peers across the ocean than with their co-nationals. They advanced an Anglo-American identity that could be at odds with the Anglophobia of many Americans in the early republic. Yet their transnational emphasis was itself premised on a sense of the importance of the American nation. In their international cooperation, they hoped to set their country in its proper position as an equal of European powers.⁴ This was clearest in the networks of evangelical reformers, who cooperated extensively with European reformers in movements for world mission and the distribution of scripture. As reformers sought to improve the frontier and the cities, as they tried to end drinking, spread “civilization,” and convert the whole world in their own image, they saw themselves as part of a global network. It was from this larger context that they approached the issues of their day: expansion, urbanization, Indian removal, colonization, and the role of women. As reformers in the early republic grappled with these questions, they worried about the overarching issues of how the rest of the world would respond to America’s actions, and where they stood in the kingdom of God. Conservative reformers of the early republic have been represented as motivated by social control. To a certain extent this is true, but ending the story there leaves out an important story about the early republic in the world. These reformers were motivated not by control for its own sake, but by a very clear vision of what their faith demanded of them and of those around them. They were an important group of Americans with a distinct vision of what their country ought to become.

EVANGELICAL REFORM ON A NATIONAL AND GLOBAL SCALE

Religious revivals in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century America and England fostered a sense of common identity across the Atlantic, as well as a shared sense of the problems that reformers might attempt to remove. Both before and after the Revolution, preachers, pamphlets, and prayers crisscrossed the Atlantic, drawing Christians towards a similar worldview. Evangelical Protestants in England and America saw themselves as part of a community of faith. Forming an “Evangelical United Front,” Christians in America and England in the early nineteenth century were similarly concerned with what they saw as the decline of traditional values in both countries. This represented a continuation of pre-revolutionary connections across the Atlantic. Many Christians in England and America felt linked by virtue of a shared culture and a shared faith, and this had important implications for reform movements in both countries. The Revolution certainly challenged these bonds, but they were by no means broken. New waves of religious revivals in America and England brought with them a sense of possibility for the improvement of the world. Though not all participants in the evangelical movement became connected with reform work, there was an important religious undertone to many of the major reform movements of the era.⁵ For American Evangelical reformers, these transatlantic

connections were inspirational and aspirational. After the Revolution, American Evangelicals became involved in mission, Bible, tract, and Sunday school societies. As they did so, they saw themselves as taking part in a large, even global, project. The cause, they felt, was God's.

Over the course of this period of transatlantic religious connections, evangelical Protestantism underwent significant shifts that had profound implications for the outlook of its adherents. By the early nineteenth century, these developments created a clear link between religion and various social and moral reform movements. The religious revivals at the turn of the nineteenth century ushered in a new style of religious expression on both sides of the Atlantic, and along with it, major debates within religious circles. These debates centered around the use of "New Measures," including emotional revivalism. These are often credited with generating enthusiasm among the Methodists and the Baptists, but they also affected the more conservative, Calvinist Presbyterians and Congregationalists who would lead so many of the reform movements of the era. Beecher was at first a strident opponent of revivalism. Indeed, he had threatened to fight Charles Finney, the embodiment of the New Measures, at the border of Connecticut before Finney had a chance to spread his message in that state. Yet by the 1830s, he had come around to embrace the New Measures and Finney himself. At the heart of this religious movement was the idea of millennialism and the confidence that human beings were capable of goodness, benevolence, and could bring about the kingdom of God on earth. The implications of this theology for reform were profound. Benevolent evangelicals came to believe that in advocating for reform, they were doing the work of God. Looking at the world around them, they saw the hand of Providence pointing them to work that they could do to improve both the lives and afterlives of other people.

The Americans who identified with this group shared more than just their religion. These were Anglophilic Christians, who took pride in their inheritance of British culture. At the close of the War of 1812, these reformers joyously reopened transatlantic correspondence that had been halted during the war. One correspondent, for example, spoke of the tears that fell "from the eyes of almost all present" at the reading of a letter from their British friends. Peace was, in the minds of many, the answer of the prayers of the righteous. Now they could get on with their work, and share the news of the increase of missionary and bible societies in the United States.⁶ As became clear in their connections to foreign missions and Cherokee removal, they were more comfortable with British overseas imperialism and less sympathetic with American territorial expansion than some of their compatriots.

Shortly after the Revolution, missionary movements on both sides of the Atlantic went through a period of revitalization. In the United States, the 1790s saw the formation of the New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut Missionary Societies, all of which sought to evangelize within the boundaries of the individual states. Initially expecting to work with Native American populations, missionaries staffed by these groups soon focused on sending ministers to the frontier to work with white settlers unable to support churches of their own. As they did so, these groups corresponded with missionary groups in Europe. For example, the directors of the New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts Missionary Societies corresponded with the leaders of British missionary societies. They elected the British directors honorary members of their societies, and the London Missionary Society returned the favor.

As they talked about their work, they made it clear that, though the Christians in each nation had their own territory in which to work, they were all participating in the same larger project: the conversion of the world.

This sense of unity prompted American Protestants to welcome visiting British missionaries on their way to their final destinations. It was common for these missionaries to stop in the United States and raise money before proceeding to India, and local American missionary and reform groups took great interest in them. One such visiting missionary pointed out to his directors in London that there were plenty of “heathen” within the United States, as well. American evangelical reformers heartily agreed. Local organizations were created to reach out to the un-churched within America. Urban missionaries responded by organizing volunteers to visit neighborhoods, distribute literature, and learn about the spiritual needs of residents. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, these reform groups organized themselves into national associations. The American Bible Society was founded in 1816, the American Sunday School Union in 1824, and the American Tract Society in 1825. These three groups were focused on distributing religious texts throughout the nation and, indeed, throughout the world. The lines between religion and reform were blurry. The Bible, supporters of these groups believed, could have profound effects on individual lives and culture at large. When they talked about the need to bring a Bible into the home of every American family, they were not only hoping to solve religious problems. They were also hoping to improve urban life, and to civilize the frontier.⁷

Many reformers were anxious about the direction that their country was heading in during the early republic. Urbanization and expansion in particular raised questions about whether America was on the right track. From their work in urban missions, middle class evangelicals had seen poverty and vice first-hand, and they wanted to do something about it. In contrast to those who found expansion to be a sign of America’s special destiny in the world, these reformers worried that the wrong sort of settlement in the frontier could create major problems for the American republic. Lyman Beecher, in his *Plea for the West*, outlined some of the reasons for this. In Beecher’s mind, the West was incredibly important. It was “destined to be the great central power of the nation,” he wrote, and as such, the “religious and political destiny of our nation is to be decided in the West.” Accordingly, the stakes were high: this was a question of “superstition, or evangelical light; of despotism, or liberty.” To ensure that the right side won in this conflict, Beecher advised sending the institutions of education and “moral culture” to the West. Frontiersmen, he was sure, could not accomplish this on their own. Reformers, mainly those from New England, were needed to make the West conform to the necessary moral order. Tracts and missionary societies could not do this alone. Reformers needed to help build permanent institutions in the West itself (like Beecher’s Lane Seminary) to be able to incorporate this region into the country on a good moral grounding. In particular, Beecher was worried about European immigrants, particularly Catholic immigrants, settling in the West and endangering American liberties by uniting the church and the state. “No government is more complex and difficult of preservation than a republic,” he reminded readers, and plainly argued that the defense of the nation itself was the duty of religious and moral reformers. Facing these problems, many reformers brought an evangelical fervor.⁸

It was out of these efforts that evangelical reformers founded the national societies for Sunday Schools as well as for the distribution of Bibles and tracts. All three of these movements focused on literacy as well as religious training. Sunday School students around the country memorized portions of the Bible and teachers preached about the importance of having a personal experience of rebirth. They read the publications of the Tract Society that emphasized not only religious conversion, but also topics dealing with reform and “civilization.” Temperance and antislavery themes were both covered by the Tract Society, as these reform movements fit easily into the larger project of benevolence. These were broadly reform-minded groups that saw religious culture as only one of many things that needed to be changed in American society. Indeed, their reform efforts went beyond national boundaries to include work for foreign missions, both by trying to raise interest within the United States and by printing materials for distribution overseas. These were very prolific groups. Under the umbrella of the American Sunday School Union, over 700,000 Sunday Schools were created in the nineteenth century; by 1830, the Tract Society was printing about six million tracts annually, and the Bible Society was publishing over a million Bibles a year.⁹

In light of this national focus, it is remarkable that the early republic saw the entry of Americans into the work of world missions. Even as the home mission movement was under way, foreign missions attracted the attention of many American Evangelicals. At first, American Protestants were content to read about the work of British missionaries in the places where British imperialism and commerce could carry them. British missions to Tahiti, South Africa, and India were widely reported in the American religious press. By 1810, however, some American Evangelicals decided that the time had come to begin foreign mission work themselves. Inspired by the British example, they insisted that they, too, had a duty to evangelize the whole world.

In 1810, a group of Andover Seminary students approached ministers in Massachusetts and Connecticut, requesting that they form an American society for foreign missions. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), founded in that year, was the first American group to ordain foreign missionaries. It was soon joined by other missionary groups with denominational affiliations. The Baptist Board of Foreign Missions was founded in 1815, after three of the ABCFM missionaries were baptized in India. In 1819, the Methodists, too, formed a missionary society. In addition to these large groups, local missionary societies formed throughout the country. Some, such as one group of Boston women interested in converting the Jews, focused on particular locations or groups they wanted to convert. Others were more general and served as auxiliaries of the national organizations.¹⁰

As American missionaries began their work overseas, they quickly spread across the globe. By 1840, American missionaries worked in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Pacific Islands, Europe, and South America, not to mention with Native American groups in North America. In this era of continental expansion, many Evangelical Americans were focused on the globe more than on the continent, and with the spread of the Kingdom of God more than the American republic. While evangelization was a primary goal of the movement, the reform of foreign cultures was equally essential. For most missionaries in this period, adoption of American “civilization”

was a necessary component of religious conversion. As missionaries traveled to spaces far away, they wrote to those at home about what they saw, the people they met, and the things they thought needed changing around the world. They cried out against caste, polygamy, and the low status of women. To American evangelicals at the time, religion was deeply connected to culture. In order to alter the world's religion, they had to also alter its culture.

Missionary letters frequently dwell on what they saw as the problems of “heathen” society, and missionaries sought to change these by building schools and preaching about the connection between social and religious matters. Education was one of the first projects of all American missions in the first half of the nineteenth century. Their schools used religious texts—some provided or funded by the Tract Society—and occasionally required chapel attendance, but the mission schools were notoriously unsuccessful at creating new converts at most mission stations throughout the world. Part of their difficulty was probably due to the fact that missionaries employed non-Christians as teachers. When possible, they had converts teach, but this was not always, or even often, possible in the early years of the century. In practice, then, missionaries were providing the skills of literacy and numeracy to hundreds of children, boys and girls, wherever they went. Women's education was a particular emphasis of the missions, as Americans were particularly horrified at what they saw as the horrible treatment of women in the non-Christian world. Mission literature frequently focused on gender roles overseas, and always pointed to the ways that “heathen” women were treated less well than American women. According to nineteenth-century American accounts, women in the non-Christian world were almost uniformly cloistered, which they compared to slavery or prison. They were uneducated, and believed to be incapable of learning. Frequently, they were abused. In the minds of American missionaries, one major point of the mission movement was, in fact, to reform gender norms around the world. American styles of marriage and women's education were presented as the epitome of “civilization” and Christianity; American readers were frequently reminded to be grateful for having been born where they were. Only Christianity, they were told, brought women to their properly elevated position in society. American Protestant Christianity, it was said, respected women.¹¹

As they worked to bring about the conversion of the world, missionaries brought the world closer to Americans at home. Missionaries urged American Christians to recognize their duty to help those living in what they called “the heathen world.” When these missionaries looked at the spread of American commerce and shipping, they saw the hand of Providence directing Americans to the parts of that world where they might be able to make a difference. As missionaries told their American readers about the sorry state of the rest of the globe, they hoped not only to encourage American Christians to support their work overseas, but also to inspire Americans to reform their own ways. American women answered this call by forming themselves into “mite societies.” Echoing the Biblical story of the widow's mite, American women contributed what they could to the conversion of the world. Some women even engaged in mission work themselves as the wives of male missionaries. Women became involved for various reasons, but certainly an important one was the ways that women overseas were portrayed.

With American and British missionaries sharing a providential reading of imperialism and commerce, it should come as no surprise that these missionaries and

their supporters on both sides of the Atlantic agreed that they were part of a single project. The providential reading of American religious duties can be linked to a similar argument being advanced by British Evangelicals at the same time. There, a group of Evangelicals insisted that the presence of a British Empire demanded a religious response. If Britain was to benefit from its empire, it needed to respond by bringing Christianity to its imperial subjects. These convictions arose out of a sense of duty and a providential reading of history. Seeing the expansion of Britain's empire and commerce into new spaces, evangelicals argued that God was creating a way for Christians to expand the church, as well. In this context, failure to act was not only a matter of neglecting their duty to the "heathen," it was disobedience against God. Americans, too, began to speak about how, if they had the "means of access" to foreign spaces, they had a duty to go there to preach and to teach. American evangelical reformers saw the spread of their country's commercial networks as providing exactly this sort of access and the resulting duty.¹²

The extent to which these evangelical reformers were anti-Catholic would be hard to overstate. Catholicism seemed foreign to evangelical reformers, who worried that "Romanist" "Papists" would have a higher allegiance to the Pope than to the republic. Beecher was explicit about this in his *Plea for the West*, and other reformers easily accepted the logic. At home, immigration made the issue of Catholicism important to evangelical reformers in the early republic. Overseas, too, anti-Catholicism shaped the efforts of evangelical reformers as they tried to outpace Catholic missionaries. Writing home to their American supporters, foreign missionaries complained that the legacy of Catholic missions made their work much harder than it might have been, introducing the "heathen" to a mistaken religion that they found as bad as Hinduism or Islam.¹³

REFORM, RACE, AND EXPANSION

The question of how to incorporate racial and ethnic differences into the American citizenry loomed over many issues for social reformers. As the American territory and economy expanded, social reformers debated the effects that these changes could have on American life. Slavery and Indian removal were two particularly heated issues that reformers faced in the early nineteenth century. Like immigration, these issues forced reformers to think about what sorts of people should be part of the political and social community of the nation. These issues at times brought reformers into conflict with the government, and found reformers talking about the ways that their country ought to relate to peoples they deemed foreign. In both of these cases, reformers thought not only about domestic effects, but also about how the nation's behavior would shape its standing on an international stage.

Before the Revolution, slavery had existed throughout the land that would become the United States. The gradual emancipation that New England enacted was accompanied by a "forgetting" of this earlier past.¹⁴ As more Americans began to have doubts about the morality of slavery, many embraced a proposal to remove, or colonize, free African-Americans from the United States to some other space. The ideas behind the colonization movement in America date to the time of the American Revolution, though it did not bring together a major coalition of supporters until the formation of the American Colonization Society in 1816. This was an extremely

popular reform movement, as well as one that has left historians with a number of questions. When supporters came together to urge the migration of African-American men and women from the United States into Africa, what exactly were they hoping to accomplish?

Some of the most heated debates about colonization so far have concerned whether this was primarily a form of gradual emancipation and a conservative alternative to abolitionism, or whether it is better understood as a racist movement that ultimately reinforced slavery in America.¹⁵ Depending on the individual colonizationist, the answer seems to be that both could be true. Colonization brought together proslavery Southerners concerned about the radicalizing influence of free blacks with opponents of slavery who worried that within America, African-Americans could never gain equality due to racial differences and prejudices. Religious colonizationists further emphasized the benefits that colonization would bring to Africa by spreading American “civilization” and Protestant Christianity in the persons of the African-American colonists.

Generally speaking, proponents of colonization were white. African-Americans in the early republic tended to oppose colonization, pointing to the racist logic that underpinned the movement. While the meaning of colonization for slavery may be debatable, it was clear about race: whites and blacks should not and could not coexist in American society. Many Americans shared Thomas Jefferson’s fear of the inevitability of race war if free blacks were welcomed into the American populace. In its most benevolent formulations, the colonization movement proposed that, due to prejudice within the United States, free blacks could not experience the full benefits of freedom, equality, or citizenship in America, and so would need to move elsewhere in order to live as men. Prominent free blacks tended to reject this reasoning and argue that instead of African-American emigration, efforts should be made to end racial prejudice within the United States. As David Walker passionately explained, “This country is as much ours as it is the whites [sic], whether they will admit it now or not, they will see and believe it by and by.”¹⁶ This was the heart of the debate around colonization: whose country was America, and what ought its populace to look like?

Obviously some African-Americans did agree that the best course would be to leave the country and start fresh in Africa. Lott Carey, for example, explained his reasoning for emigrating in terms that paralleled white arguments. Carey was born a slave in Virginia, and was able to buy his freedom and live in Richmond. There, he became a Baptist preacher. As opposed to Walker’s identification with America, Carey reflected that “I am an African; and in this country, however meritorious my conduct, and respectable my character, I cannot receive the credit due to either.” Accordingly, he would go to Liberia, where he hoped to be judged “by my merits—not by my complexion.” In 1821, accordingly, Carey left America as a missionary to Liberia with the American Colonization Society. Other colonists had more circumscribed choices than Carey. Some slaveholders made colonization a condition of manumission, leaving African-American women and men with the choice between slavery and Liberia. Since the incredibly high mortality rate of those who went to Liberia was well known, and since emigration would mean forever leaving family, friends, and home, these were difficult decisions to make.¹⁷

Those who emigrated hoped to find new opportunities. Some, like Carey, also hoped to improve the lives of Africans. Borrowing from the mission movement (and

indeed, taking part in the mission movement), the Colonization Society spoke not only about the benefits that colonization would bring to the United States and to emigrants, but also about the benefits that colonization could bring to those already living in Liberia. African-Americans would be the bearers of American culture, and would plant American-style political and social institutions in Africa. Through the colony, Africans would learn of Christianity and come to be “civilized.” In this formulation, the Colonization Society was an international reform organization.

In addition to asking what colonization can tell us about the history of slavery and antislavery in the United States, we might try to better understand how this movement fits into the story of American expansion and the relationship of the United States to the rest of the world. The idea of colonization was, in the first place, created in an international context. It was the example of the British in Sierra Leone that made colonization seem likely of success to many Americans. The British, like the Americans, saw an African colony as a possible solution to the question of what to do with free men and women of African descent within England. The colony at Sierra Leone was seen as a way to simultaneously help free blacks, who felt that Africa was a place where they might acquire land, security, and autonomy, while creating an important base for English commercial interests in Africa. English abolitionists, such as Granville Sharp, increasingly saw Africa as a possible solution for the problems of slavery, and they accordingly supported the colony. One major advantage of the colony, later adopted by the Americans in Liberia, was that it was an imperial venture that depended on private support. Not dependent on government action, though benefitting from government support, Sierra Leone was directed by interested individuals within British reform networks.¹⁸

This was the goal in Liberia, as well. While the colony was only possible through the financial and, to a lesser extent, military support of the American government, the actual operations of Liberia were under the control of governors appointed by the Colonization Society. The Society itself had support from politicians including Henry Clay and Charles Fenton Mercer. It was through Mercer’s Slave Trade Act of 1819 that the Society gained the right to purchase land in Africa for the purpose of colonizing free African-Americans there. Once the colony was established, the West African coast was patrolled by the African Squadron, a branch of the US Navy. By and large, though, the colony was the project of white American reformers and African-American colonists. Early reports on the status of the colony focused on the development of agriculture and commerce, the numbers of wood-frame and stone houses, the erection of schools and churches, the condition of the roads—in short, they focused on how quickly Liberia was becoming “civilized.”¹⁹

By the mid-1830s, colonization was no longer so popular a solution to the question of slavery. While African-Americans continued to migrate to Liberia under the aegis of the American Colonization Society for decades, the Society had lost much of its white support. As Mary Hershberger has argued, part of the explanation for this can be found in the events surrounding Cherokee removal in the 1820s and early 1830s. Cherokee removal, like colonization, was premised on the assumption that a multiracial republic could not function properly. Both movements suggested the physical removal of nonwhites from United States territory to make that land safe for white citizens. For many of those early supporters of colonization, who had been inspired by antislavery or evangelical motives, the similarities between the two

movements were uncomfortable. For while these colonizationists had endorsed the removal of African-Americans, they opposed that of the Cherokee.²⁰

For New England-based reformers, opposition to Cherokee removal was common. Missionary work had brought reformers into closer contact with the “civilized” tribes of Native Americans, and this affiliation brought reformers into conflict with the government policy of removal. Those who had followed the progress of missions among the Cherokee and Choctaw in particular were shocked at the abandonment of the country’s earlier policy of “civilization” among Native Americans. During Washington’s administration, Henry Knox had first suggested that the federal government ought to be interested in promoting Indian “civilization.” This had two major points of inspiration, rooted in foreign relations and economics. For the former, Knox and others believed that “civilized” and Christianized Native Americans would make natural allies for the United States. At the very least, they could serve as buffers between the United States and other powers in North America; at most, they could actively help the interests of the country. Economically, many Americans believed that “civilizing” Native Americans would make it easier for white Americans to gain access to their land. Once Native American groups shifted their mode of living from hunting to agriculture, this argument went, it would be clear to them how inefficiently they used their land, making it available for purchase by the United States. Both of these arguments behind the “civilization” policy, it should be noted, took for granted that Native American tribes were foreign nations with sovereignty over their own land until they chose to sell it.

By 1816, the “civilization” program could be seen in the government support of missions to Native American tribes, including the Cherokee. In 1820, this was formalized when Congress created a special Civilization Fund. The Fund appropriated \$10,000 for the purposes of “civilization of the Indian tribes” throughout the country. As Secretary of War, John C. Calhoun distributed these funds to various missionary societies working with a number of different groups. Within two years, the government sponsored fourteen different schools with over five hundred students. Most of the money went to the missions to the Cherokee. These missions brought not only ordained clergy, but also pious farmers and schoolteachers into Indian Country to help introduce Native American people to the so-called “arts of civilization.” At these schools, Americans who had been interested in the mission movement but lacked the theological training to serve as missionaries themselves could become assistant missionaries and help transform entire cultures, for this was as much a goal of the schools as religious conversion. At mission schools, Indian children were taught how to dress, farm, and sew like Americans. This curriculum was a requirement of the government. Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun took part in these discussions and promised that the government would pay for the mission’s school buildings, supply agricultural and textile tools, as well as some direct financial support, in exchange for annual reports detailing the school’s progress in agriculture, carpentry, blacksmithing, and masonry.²¹

In 1809, Indian Agent Return Meigs had created a “Statistical Table” to measure the progress of the Cherokee towards an agricultural and “civilized” way of life. Within the next decade and a half, huge changes seemed to have occurred. These changes generally focused on a prosperous elite within the Nation who were more and more resembling their white neighbors, adopting plantation farming methods

and introducing new laws to regulate life and work. It was this group that was most likely to cooperate with the missionaries who entered the Cherokee Nation. By the 1820s, missionaries and their correspondents in the Department of War alike discussed the Cherokee, in particular, as future citizens. Religious reformers were delighted to read of conversions, but they were also pleased by the introduction of Sequoyia's Syllabary and the creation of a Cherokee Constitution modeled on that of the United States. Now with a written language and a constitutional government, the Cherokee, along with the Choctaw, seemed to be assimilating to white American norms. These developments were important for the ways that they brought in all of the Cherokee; while English-speaking elites could be taught to read and write in that language, seventy-five percent of the Cherokee Nation spoke no English in the mid-1820s. The Syllabary gave them the basis for a "civilization" founded on their own language.²²

Given this apparent stride towards "civilization" and assimilation, it seemed a particular tragedy when the Cherokee were told that this was not enough. Not all Americans, of course, were in favor of "civilizing" Native American tribes; many were more concerned with gaining access to their land. The election of Andrew Jackson marked a major transition point in the relations between Native Americans and the US government. For years, the government of Georgia had been trying to claim sovereignty over Cherokee land. With Jackson in the White House, the state government had the support of the federal government. This action was justified by the firm belief of the racial inferiority of the Cherokee. Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830 promised benefits to both the United States and Native Americans. Separated from the whites, Jackson argued, Indians would be freed to "pursue happiness in their own way and under their own rude institutions."²³

Reformers rejected the logic of Jackson's Removal Act, insisting that it represented a new and dangerous step in American-Indian relations. Opposition was not limited to those who had been interested in Indian missions, though they made up a vocal component of the group. In comparison to Jackson's reference to "rude institutions," these reformers held up the Cherokee Nation as an example of a group well on its way to a civilized status. With that understanding, combined with their interpretation of the history of US-Indian relations, opponents of Cherokee removal insisted that this was a radical break in American history. Previously, Native American groups had been treated as foreign powers with sovereignty over their own land; now, opponents argued, the government was taking on a dangerous and unjust position.

The case against Indian removal by white Americans was most eloquently stated by Jeremiah Evarts, writing under the pseudonym of William Penn, in his *Essays on the Present Crisis in the Condition of the American Indians*. Evarts, the Corresponding Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, was well informed about the current state of Indian missions, and was deeply committed to the cause of Cherokee "civilization." Like many other reformers opposed to removal, he was not content to have Americans simply leave Native Americans alone; opponents of removal were absolutely committed to helping bring about changes in Native American groups. Evarts disagreed with Jackson, though, about what the relationship between the government and Native Americans ought to look like. This was a debate over not only the fate of American Indians, but also the role of the American federal government.

Given Evarts's position within the mission movement, the most remarkable thing about his essays was how little they dealt with religious or moral themes. These were explicitly political arguments, with an emphasis on the treaty history between the United States and Indian tribes and the international ramifications of unjust behavior by the United States. Only in the twenty-second of twenty-four letters did Evarts turn his focus to the morality of the laws, asking whether "the reasoning or the morality" of the law was more remarkable. The minds of benevolent Americans, he argued, were united against Indian removal. Evarts insisted that information was needed by the mass of Americans to be able to understand the situation, and that this was an eminently important issue for the nation, which would ultimately be judged both "by the whole civilized world," and "the Great Arbiter of Nations." That information consisted of a lengthy history of the status of the Cherokee; the history of treaties between the United States and American Indians; the specific history of the conflict between the Cherokee and Georgia; and a discussion of the nature of nations, consent, and sovereignty.²⁴

Evarts advised the leaders of the Cherokee opposition on the best methods to have their voices heard by the government, urging them to take their case to the Supreme Court. This case became *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, which was ultimately unsuccessful at ending removal and introduced the phrase "domestic dependent nation" to describe Native American groups. It was only when the white missionaries challenged a Georgia law forcing them to declare allegiance to the state that the Supreme Court opposed Cherokee removal. *Worcester v. Georgia*, however, was ultimately unenforced. The movement against Cherokee removal—by both white American reformers and the Cherokee themselves—was defeated with the signing of the Treaty of New Echota, in which a small group of elite Cherokee made a deal with the US government, setting in motion the forced migration of the last of the American Indian tribes of the Southeast into reservations west of the Mississippi.

This ultimate failure of the movement against Cherokee removal was incredibly significant for reform activism in the antebellum period. Not only did it help mark the shift from colonization towards abolition, it was also a turning point in the ways that regional politics affected reform. When the opponents of removal ultimately gave up, it was because of a new way of thinking about the South. In spite of their national titles, the major evangelical reform groups had long been based in New England. While they hoped to gain support from southern Christians, they did not make much of an effort. In the discussion of Cherokee removal, certainly, the southern states were one of the major obstacles that reformers were facing. They sided with the Cherokee against the South. Yet as missionaries sat in jail awaiting the enforcement of the *Worcester* decision, the Nullification Crisis dramatically changed the way that the reformers approached the issue. Southern evangelicals who sympathized with the missionary movement appealed to the Board that they must end their challenge of Georgia law and removal. If the federal government actually enforced the Supreme Court's decision, they argued, Georgia would unite with South Carolina in the doctrine of nullification and could cause a civil war. In the face of this threat, the missionaries completely abandoned their efforts to fight Indian removal. This movement, which had been about morality, "civilization," and American foreign relations, was ultimately set aside in the interest of national unity.

Accordingly, Cherokee removal began a change in the way that religious reformers discussed the goals of “civilization” versus evangelization. By equating “civilization” and Christianity with New England values, the opponents of Cherokee removal had risked antagonizing the South. In the current political climate, such risks no longer seemed wise. In the decades following the Trail of Tears, evangelicals became less likely to emphasize the need for cultural reform as part and parcel of religious change. By the second half of the nineteenth century, this early link between evangelical Protestantism and reform was decidedly less distinct.²⁵

REFORMING THE NATION’S MORALS: GENDER AND THE FAMILY

The movement against Cherokee removal was also important for helping to spur discussions among reformers about the role of women in American society. These conversations, echoed throughout the range of reform movements in the early republic, set the stage for major reconsiderations of the state of the family and morality in America. As reformers distributed Bibles and thought about colonization, they also worried about things like drinking, prostitution, and the moral decay of their country. The family was central to these reformers’ hopes for helping their country to stay on the right track. As many historians have noted, one of the major effects of early-nineteenth-century social reform efforts was the beginning of an organized movement for women’s rights. This is perhaps ironic, as it meant that one of the most radical movements in nineteenth-century politics and society emerged out of the frequently conservative movements for social and moral reform.²⁶

Perhaps no American was more concerned about the state of morality in his country than Lyman Beecher. His concerns were not limited to the West. The nation as a whole, he felt, was guilty of a great sin. That sin was intemperance. Drinking was a major concern for many Americans in the early republic. Up to this time, alcohol consumption was a common part of American life and sociability. When drinking water was not seen as safe, alcoholic drinks appeared healthful. Drinking as a break during the workday or in celebration was an important way of creating community. Middle class reformers began to challenge this, though, as they came to see the negative effects of drinking. Over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, a major transformation in American drinking habits occurred. Overall consumption dropped as church-goers were urged to sign temperance and teetotal pledges, some of which could be pasted into the family Bible.

The impetus for temperance at this time came from a number of places. Employers found it difficult to instill the discipline needed in a newly forming industrial order without limiting the drinking habits of employees, but this was not the only factor. More than this was the sense of the social ills that drinking could cause. Inspired by Dr. Benjamin Rush’s findings that distilled drinks could lead to physical, mental, and moral destruction, reformers called for temperance. These early calls did not suggest that abstinence was desirable. In fact, Rush had found that beer could be beneficial to the health. The problem was with drunkenness and liquor. This early differentiation between types of drinking explains why the first Saratoga County temperance group would come together in 1808 to promise, not to abstain from drinking, but to avoid wine or distilled spirits unless advised to do so by a doctor.

From these foundations, the movement for temperance grew quickly and dramatically. In the 1810s, intemperance became a major example of public sin within the republic, and New England reformers became more and more concerned about ending it. Temperance groups proliferated on a local level. Reformers began to preach about the inevitable fall of the intemperate. Drinking led to melancholy, economic ruin, the destruction of families, and disorder. These arguments were most famously outlined in Lyman Beecher's sermons on intemperance, published in 1827. Here, Beecher made the shift towards total abstinence from alcoholic consumption, and labeled intemperance "the sin of our land." He outlined the physical and moral outcome of drinking, and expanded the definition of intemperance to include a wider range of drinking habits, such as drinking as part of "family hospitality" and in public life. The second of these is important, for Beecher did not limit his discussions to the evil effects of drink on individuals; rather, he focused on the way that intemperance would affect the nation as a whole. Taking it for granted that "communities which rise by a violation of the laws of humanity and equity shall not prosper," he outlined the decline that the country could expect if its citizens continued in intemperance. Drinking would be

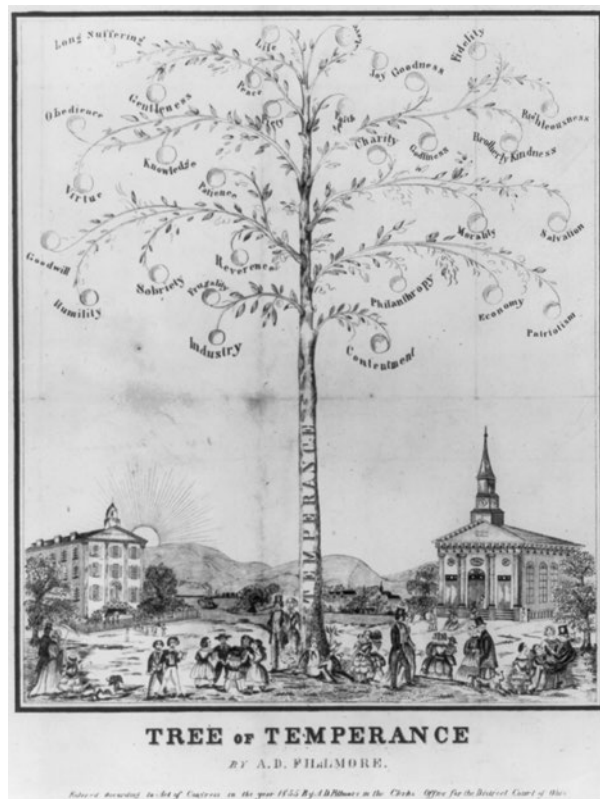


Figure 16.1 This 1855 print depicts the moral reform belief in the interconnection of virtuous behavior and virtuous outcomes. The tree of temperance produces a host of desired personal qualities and a happy and well-ordered society. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-54497.

deadly to “the national conscience or moral principle,” as it caused men to lose their sense of fear of God and accountability to their fellow men. Patriotism itself would fall victim to drinking, he insisted, for if a man had lost his sense of duty to his family, how much more would he lose his connection to a country. “A nation of drunkards,” Beecher warned, “would constitute a hell.” Intelligence and virtue, those “pillars of republican institutions,” were attacked by intemperance. The nation, not just the individual, required a movement to end drinking in America. He ended his lectures with a call for the banning of the sale of ardent spirits, comparing the end of drinking to the end of slavery as a necessary political response to a moral question.²⁷

With these lectures, Beecher emerged as a leader in the national temperance movement, organized in 1826 under the mantle of the American Temperance Society. Like the Tract and Bible Societies, the Temperance Society brought together local groups under a national umbrella. This was a very popular group, with a wide range of membership. Within three years, there were one thousand chapters of the society with some one hundred thousand members. By the 1850s, temperance was a major political force at the state and local levels. It was also an important group for training individuals who would go on to be important in other reform movements (it was especially significant for the women’s rights movement).²⁸

As this connection to Beecher and the language of sin should suggest, the temperance movement was connected to the religious revivals of the time. Residents of Rochester, NY during Charles Finney’s 1830 visit, for example, could enjoy a four-hour temperance lecture by Theodore Weld as part of the revival’s activities. This lecture was moving enough to prompt an immediate demand from Methodist and Baptist ministers that the grocers in the city promise to stop selling liquor. The next day, owners of the largest grocery warehouse in Rochester smashed their stock of whiskey in the sidewalk, pouring thousands of gallons of liquor out on the street. Signing the teetotal pledge became an important part of showing that one had undergone a conversion experience.²⁹ Temperance was also advocated from more secular angles, particularly through the use of melodramatic “cautionary temperance tales.” These circulated on both sides of the Atlantic, in print and on stage. These tended to focus on the negative impacts of intemperance on the family of the drunkard. Innocent wives and children were abandoned and abused while husbands and fathers used the family’s food money to buy drink.³⁰ Within the United States, temperance tales frequently addressed the issue of immigration by depicting Irish immigrants in particular as drunks. In this context, the discussion of temperance came to focus at least in part on the question of who ought to be part of American society. If criticizing drinking was a way of criticizing immigrants, then temperance was identified with American identity.³¹

Drinking was not the only threat to the morals of the country. Urban missions opened middle class reformers’ eyes not only to poverty, but also to vice. The movement to end prostitution, called the moral reform movement, emerged out of such a city mission. John McDowall, for example, was one such missionary. As a divinity school student, McDowall spent the summer of 1830 in New York City distributing bibles and tracts. There, he came to find prostitution to be a major scourge on the city and in desperate need for change. He published his findings, reporting as many as ten thousand “malevolent, cruel, and revengeful” prostitutes living in New York at the time. If these figures were true, they would have meant that one of every seven women living in the city at the time were prostitutes. This was an

overestimation for sure, but suggests some of the discomfort that many Americans had with the urbanization of their country.³²

Reformers following McDowell established Magdalen Societies and houses of reform, where women could live outside of the city and receive practical help. These had the support of the clergy and were run by male reformers. In this way they resembled the Magdalen Hospitals of eighteenth-century London.³³ The Magdalen Societies emphasized women's guilt and sin; prostitutes were depicted as suffering from "self-inflicted" problems as the result of a "voluntary vice." They were blamed for leading men astray by these reformers, who were so worried about the status of the young American men moving to cities away from their traditional support networks in order to find employment. Women needing help were faced with a choice between the difficulties of taking care of themselves and the discomfort of strict oversight and criticism from the reformers.

By the early 1830s, female reformers began to shift the way that this movement operated. Forming the American Female Moral Reform Society in 1834, they emphasized instead the degeneracy of the men who frequented prostitutes. Like the Magdalen Societies, they formed refuges for prostitutes where they might be taught new skills that could help them secure more respectful employment. While the male and female branches of the anti-prostitution movement differed in their arguments and their means, they shared a sense of cities as spaces in need of reform in order for the country as a whole to be morally on the right track.³⁴

The women of the Female Moral Reform Society were frequently critiqued for taking on an unbecoming role. By talking publicly about sex and prostitution, they were seen as moving beyond the appropriate boundaries of women's reform activities. This sort of criticism was not limited to moral reform women. Indeed, by the mid-1830s, women's activism in reform movements was prominent enough to spark a major debate about women's role in reform and, indeed, in American society at large. Though not a feminist by any stretch of the imagination, Catharine Beecher is a great example of the complex responses that women had to the questions raised by the international and national dimensions of reform in the early republic. Beecher was a reformer by birth. As the daughter of Lyman Beecher, she was raised in temperance and religion. As a young woman she became involved in movements to improve women's education and professional options. It was Beecher who, after talking about Cherokee removal with family friend Jeremiah Evarts, penned the appeal asking American women to speak out against it. As a result, Cherokee removal became one of the first issues about which American women petitioned their government in large numbers. Echoing Evarts's arguments from his William Penn letters, she discussed the history of relations between white Americans and American Indians, pointing in particular to the past help that American Indians had given white settlers as well as the tradition of treating tribes as foreign nations. The forced removal of the Cherokee and other tribes would mark a departure from this past. Beecher felt strongly enough about this issue to invoke the story of Esther as she encouraged American women to petition their government on behalf of the Cherokee. In contrast to this stance, of course, is Beecher's famous opposition to abolition, particularly when voiced by American women. In her reply to Angelina Grimké, she even went so far as to critique the abolitionist's use of Esther.³⁵

Beecher's opposition to the Grimkés raises several questions for the historian of American reform. In the first place, the general shift away from colonization by the

1830s raises the question of what she, and reformers like her, saw as distinguishing the removal of one group of people from America versus the removal of another. The use of Esther in both examples also raises the question of the propriety of women's political involvement. This, of course, was the stated reason for Beecher's opposition to the Grimké's abolitionism, though her own advocacy of women's petitioning certainly went beyond the realm of "influence" that she claimed women ought to limit themselves to. Indeed, in multiple reform movements, women by the late 1830s were stretching the meaning of influence to include some direct activity. As female temperance workers advocated the end of drinking, for example, some also began to reconsider the justice of the ways that the law governed marriages between drunken husbands and their abused wives. Women ought to be able to control their own wages, they argued; the more radical even began discussing the possibility of easing restrictions on divorce.³⁶

As colonization gave way to abolitionism, women's participation would become a major splintering point in American reform movements. It was in this context that



Figure 16.2 This Currier and Ives print from 1874 conveys the connections forged during the nineteenth century between the temperance movement and women's involvement in political issues. Often activism in moral reform movements such as temperance led women to the abolitionist movement and the demand for women's suffrage. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-683.

Catharine Beecher had spoken against the Grimké's. Echoing the logic of earlier reformers speaking about gender, she reminded her readers that Christianity had "given to woman her true place in society." While male reformers might "act on society by the collision of intellect, in public debate" or use shame, fear, and personal interest to coerce others to agree with him, or even use "physical force," these were not options for female reformers. Women, instead, needed to "win every thing by peace and love; by making herself so much respected, esteemed and loved, that to yield to her opinions and to gratify her wishes, will be the free-will offering of the heart." Beecher was, of course, not alone in thinking this way. Many male reformers and religious figures agreed with her, which was why this became such a heavily debated topic in American reform circles in the late 1830s.

The history of women in American reform provides one of the clearest examples of the international dimensions of moral and social reform in the early republic. For it was in London, in 1840, that histories of the American women's movement begin, with the meeting of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott at the World Anti-Slavery Convention. It was the connections between British and American reformers that brought the Americans to London; and it was the differences between the reform styles on the opposite sides of the Atlantic that kept the female American delegates from participating in the convention. For while American reform movements in the early republic were formed in an international context, they were also always responding to the particular needs and interests of the early republic.

American reformers in the first decades of the nineteenth century had a complex relationship with their nation. Like Lyman Beecher, they found much to criticize, but did so from a place of deep faith in the American project. When they argued with others over the course that their country was taking, they did so from a conviction that America did have a higher purpose. They simply disagreed with many expansionists over what that purpose was. The reformers' gaze was directed across the Atlantic as much as it was directed towards the Pacific. American moral reformers hoped to emulate England, and to make the rest of the world, America included, better exemplify Anglo-American ideals of Protestant "civilization" and morality.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE PENDULUM SWINGS

The Rise of Antislavery Sentiment Between the Revolution and Civil War



Richard Newman

In November of 1863, President Abraham Lincoln traveled to a Pennsylvania battlefield to give Civil War Americans an antislavery rallying cry. After pulling a brief speech out of his hat, Lincoln told northerners that the battle of Gettysburg—and by extension the mass military death occasioned by sectional warfare—was not about vengeance, political power, or economic domination but rather a very simple principle: “a new birth of freedom.”¹ In the reconstructed Union, slavery would be eradicated and government “of the people, by the people, for the people” would truly reign, freeing whites from the stain of bondage and blacks from the shackles of slavery.

In the midst of war, Lincoln’s words seemed revolutionary. Yet they had a deep history in American social and political life. Four score and some years before, a similar proposition had been put forth by the new nation’s first antislavery group: the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS).² Formed in 1775 in Philadelphia, the PAS believed that both sacred and secular principles commanded liberty and justice across the color line. As the group put it in a 1790 petition to Congress, “mankind are all formed by the same Almighty being” and, according to the Declaration of Independence, had “equal liberty” in the United States. With these principles in mind, the PAS pushed, American statesmen should use their considerable power to eradicate slavery and racial injustice.³

As these twin antislavery vignettes indicate, the struggle against bondage was nothing new in Civil War America. Indeed, black and white abolitionists had been challenging racial oppression since the nation’s founding years, bequeathing a language of universal freedom to subsequent statesmen like Lincoln. Nevertheless, the road to final freedom in the 1860s was rough, winding, and anything but certain. No sooner had the PAS called on Congress to ban bondage in 1790 than some southern politicians threatened disunion. By the 1830s, abolitionists discovered that many northern whites viewed *them* as subversives for protesting slavery’s massive growth in American society. Even in the Civil War era, a solid contingent of northerners (to say nothing of Confederates) pictured national emancipation as problematic if not wholly incompatible with white liberty. As Pennsylvania Congressman Charles Biddle argued passionately in 1862, he feared southern emancipation every

bit as much as any planter. These were “my sentiments as a white man,” he admitted, and he would not easily relinquish them.⁴ Thus, while many Americans grew to accept antislavery beliefs by the 1860s—particularly the notion that slavery violated essential aspects of the American creed—others registered continuing concerns about abolitionism.

That abolitionists were stymied for so long, and had opponents north as well as south right into the 1860s, offers a stark reminder of slavery’s power in the American Republic. Yet the ascension of antislavery sentiment—culminating in Civil War emancipation—also tells us that a host of Americans did change their views of bondage. Understanding the abolitionist struggle as a century-long process to convince Americans to slay slavery, rather than as a by-product of antebellum sectionalism, helps us appreciate the longstanding ideological commitments of antislavery activists to complete the promises of the American Revolution and build a multicultural nation.⁵ It also helps explain why it ultimately took sectional battle to end bondage in the United States, for no matter how far antislavery feeling traveled in the pre-Civil War Union, mass abolitionism remained a distant possibility. As Lincoln knew perhaps better than any other American politician, only when mass death visited the war-torn nation did abolitionist arguments truly win the day.

FROM ANTISLAVERY SENTIMENT TO ABOLITIONIST ACTION IN THE AGE OF ATLANTIC REVOLUTIONS

The rise of American antislavery sentiment at the end of the eighteenth century occurred against the backdrop of shifting economic, governmental, and philosophical perspectives. Prior to the advent of the revolutionary age, when concepts of egalitarianism came into vogue, relatively few people questioned bondage globally. “Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains,” the Genevan philosopher Rousseau declared famously in the *Social Contract* (1762).⁶ By the late 1700s, however, citizens across the Atlantic world began re-examining slavery’s place in modern society. “I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just,” a slaveholding Thomas Jefferson observed of bondage in the 1780s.⁷ In Jefferson’s eyes, a slaveholding nation that also espoused equality would surely invite condemnation from nature and nature’s god. For a short but important period of time, many Americans agreed.⁸

Early antislavery ideology flowed from two main sources. One was philosophical and religious: egalitarian ideas circulating in the Age of Revolution. By the 1770s, both secular and sacred writers had imagined worlds without oppression. Colonial activists struggling against British imperial rule creatively deployed a nascent human rights ideology to justify their independence. Religious writers added that black bondage violated scripture, including the Acts of the Apostles: The Lord “Hath Made of One Blood of All Nations of Men.”⁹ During the 1770s, Methodists like John Wesley critiqued slavery as ungodly while Philadelphia Quakers—long in the antislavery vanguard—adopted formal strictures against bondage. As Anthony Benezet, a leading Quaker reformer, noted, revolutionary governments should follow the lead of social and religious reformers by making abolitionist policy the new standard of modernity.¹⁰

But early antislavery ideology was also shaped by African-American action. Employing a variety of tactics, from flight to rebellion, enslaved people made bold

bids for freedom throughout the eighteenth century. Benjamin Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette* testified to black restiveness in the mid-Atlantic region by printing over a thousand runaway slave ads during the 1700s. A variety of slave rebellions—particularly uprisings in Dutch Surinam and British Jamaica in the 1760s—prompted further antislavery reflection among statesmen and reformers. And during the Revolutionary War, tens of thousands of blacks fled for freedom. Many flooded British lines after Lord Dunmore's 1775 Proclamation offered liberty to Virginia blacks deserting their patriot masters. Similar edicts in the mid-Atlantic prompted runaways to head for the British stronghold of New York City. By 1783, black loyalists in New York alone numbered roughly 3,000—a staggering number for the time. These black Loyalists came from New Jersey, Virginia, South Carolina and a variety of other locales. Most never returned to bondage, journeying instead throughout Atlantic society in search of freedom and peace.¹¹

Black protest had profound consequences for slavery in the New Republic.¹² As Caesar Sarter wrote from Massachusetts in 1774, African-Americans would now tell whites that “[we are] entitled to the same natural rights of mankind that you are.”¹³ After the Revolution, Bay State blacks initiated a series of freedom suites—including one by an enslaved woman who took the name of Elizabeth Freeman—that served as the foundation for a 1783 state Supreme Court decision declaring slavery dead.¹⁴ In Virginia, enslaved people who did not run to British forces often secured promises of liberation from patriots. Indeed, the Virginia assembly changed its manumission rules in 1782 to allow masters to liberate bondpeople without special legislative approval. By the early 1800s, over 6,000 slaves had been manumitted in the Old Dominion.¹⁵

More generally, a variety of American statesmen proposed abolitionist policies after the Revolution, particularly in the North. By 1804, every state above the Mason-Dixon line had secured a gradual abolition statute or emancipation plan. Pennsylvania abolitionism was the tipping point. Positioned in the middle of the new nation, Pennsylvania had a small number of slaves compared to most southern states but a large number compared to its northern neighbors—roughly 7,000 in 1780. That year, Pennsylvania became the first state in the Western world to pass a gradual abolition law. According to the statute, enslaved people born after 1780 would be liberated at the age of 28, an elongated timeframe that acknowledged the importance not only of slaveholders' economic concerns even in the North, but white Pennsylvanians' worries about black liberty. Still, the law was a milestone.¹⁶ Now the Quaker State became the dividing line between bondage and freedom in American society. As the preamble to the Quaker State's abolition statute declared, white Americans who once had been enslaved by the “tyranny of Great Britain” now had a “duty . . . to extend a portion of that freedom [they had achieved] to [enslaved people.]”¹⁷

The Quaker State also spawned several abolitionist groups with national and even international reach. Drawing on Quaker antislavery traditions, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society became the world's foremost abolitionist organization, with corresponding members stretching from the Caribbean to Europe. After supporting Pennsylvania's gradual abolition act, PAS members pressured politicians across the American union to adopt antislavery laws. Not only did the group petition the Constitutional Convention of 1787 to ban the slave trade (Ben Franklin pocketed

the document) but it sent antislavery memorials to state and federal governments throughout the early national period. The group also became a clearinghouse of abolitionist information, forwarding antislavery writings, laws, and commentary to reformers across the Atlantic world. Finally, the PAS offered legal aid services to endangered blacks, from African-Americans who had been kidnapped into bondage, to fugitive slaves seeking asylum in Pennsylvania.¹⁸

The PAS was not the only abolitionist group taking shape in early national Pennsylvania. Free black reformers mobilized as well. Often based in autonomous black churches, which grew out of confrontations with (and departures from) segregated white churches in the 1790s, free black abolitionists agitated against slavery, the slave trade, and the nation's first federal fugitive slave law (passed in 1793). Free black Philadelphians published an array of antislavery essays and poems, joining a black literary crusade against bondage. In Philadelphia, Richard Allen, who along with Absalom Jones had co-authored the first copyrighted black pamphlet in 1794 critiquing racism as an American original sin, proclaimed that a biracial future would only strengthen the American nation. "It is in our posterity enjoying the same privileges with your own," he observed, "that you ought to look for better things."¹⁹ As a former slave who worked like hell to earn his freedom from a Delaware master, Allen knew racial oppression deep in his bones. Yet he spoke to a black prophetic belief that the New Republic could be a bulwark of African-American freedom.²⁰

Despite its liberal leanings and bi-racial abolitionist foundations, Pennsylvania also offered a cautionary tale about the limits of antislavery action in early American culture. For the gradual abolition law of 1780 did not ban bondage entirely (those born *before* 1780 would remain enslaved in perpetuity, at least in theory). Moreover, a sizable number of whites believed that even freed blacks needed to serve a probationary period before becoming equal citizens. As Benjamin Franklin, a slaveholder who became head of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society at the end of his life, put it in 1789, blacks who had long been treated as machines needed nurturing before being viewed as civic equals.²¹

In the Upper South, where slavery remained the dominant social institution well after the Revolution, whites registered even more concern about black freedom. Even if slavery was wrong, many Virginians believed that black liberty might be worse. "It will probably be asked," Jefferson wrote in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, "Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state, and thus save the expense of supplying, by importation of white settlers, the vacancies they will leave?" Jefferson answered that the "[d]eep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites" and "ten thousand recollections, by the blacks" prevented consideration of full emancipation in the Old Dominion. With that analysis, Jefferson also dispatched the idea of a bi-racial republic.²²

Here Jefferson acknowledged a powerful anti-abolition mentality still operating in post-Revolutionary American culture: the idea that black freedom might undermine white republicanism and democracy. Throughout the early Republic, masters and their anti-abolitionist allies would decry the meddlesome methods of antislavery reformers, whose belief in black freedom and equality would lead (in their eyes) to American ruin. By the 1790s, Deep South slaveholders in Georgia and South Carolina revived proslavery arguments quashed during Revolutionary times to picture slavery as a necessary part of American nation-building. Not only did whites need enslaved

blacks to expand American economic frontiers, they asserted, but African-Americans were ill-equipped for freedom. Virginians agreed, refusing to adopt a gradual abolition law proposed by jurist St. George Tucker. What would free blacks do, masters wondered, beyond bondage? As they saw it, liberty was the province of white men. Whether in the form of property rights or political standing, liberty had a color and it was not black.²³

The roots of this particular argument went deep into the colonial past. But they also had a more recent vintage: imperial battles preceding the American Revolution. During the Seven Years War and Pontiac's rebellion, backcountry whites (from Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland and New Jersey) captured by native groups were kept alongside runaway slaves—a captive condition whites found unacceptable. When whites were finally redeemed, many came to believe that their liberation had been inspired by God. Yet they also believed that both religion and society still sanctioned slavery for nonwhite peoples—savages, as they saw them. In this way, white liberty was differentiated from black bondage at almost the same moment that whites began articulating the meaning of their rights within (and then beyond) the British Empire. To be white was to be blessed with an entire complement of rights; to be a slave was the antithesis of both freedom and white identity.²⁴ In short, antislavery sentiment would have to travel much further in order to vanquish deep-seated doubts that people of color could be free and equal in American culture.

ANTISLAVERY ACTIVISM IN THE NEW CENTURY

Despite anti-abolitionist concerns, race reformers remained optimistic as a new century appeared on the horizon. Members of the American Convention of Abolition Societies gathering in Philadelphia in 1794 agreed that the future still held great hope. Attempting to coordinate abolitionism across state lines, the group sought “to vindicate the honor of the United States, the rights of man, and the dignity of human nature,” as a draft memorial to politicians throughout the Union declared.²⁵ With a ban on the overseas slave trade secured in 1808, abolitionists looked forward to a day when bondage itself would vanish. Perhaps the most underrated piece of anti-slavery legislation in early national society, the American law followed a British ban the previous year. The fact that masters (via northern merchants) had imported roughly 40,000 enslaved people in the few years before the law took shape indicated that American bondage was still powerful. Yet the fact that a slaveholding president—Jefferson—had supported the federal ban inspired white reformers.²⁶

African-Americans certainly applauded slave trade abolition, though they did so in ways that radicalized the abolitionist struggle. Black communities began using January 1st (when the law took effect in 1808) as a festive day to spur further abolitionist action in America.²⁷ Holding public rallies, giving rousing speeches, and printing antislavery treatises, black communities from Boston to Philadelphia mobilized not only to honor Americans for securing the slave trading ban but to mock them for still tolerating bondage. “Once more we would take the liberty to ask the objector against freedom,” a black Bostonian observed at a January 1st assembly in 1808, “whether the complexion of one nation entitles them to serve as the property of another? Or, in other words, whether Africans ought to be subject to the British or Americans because they are of a dark complexion?”²⁸ In the eyes of this

“Son of Africa,” Americans must destroy domestic slavery before they could truly celebrate themselves as the defenders of universal liberty.

His words were prescient. Far from establishing a firm foundation for slavery’s demise, the 1808 slave trade ban proved to be the last major piece of abolitionist legislation before the Civil War. This is a particularly striking fact when, considered from an international perspective, abolitionism expanded globally during the nineteenth century, with slave trading bans often preceding abolition edicts. Latin American nations emerging from Spanish rule banned bondage during the 1810s and 1820s while both the British and French secured emancipation edicts in the 1830s and 1840s. By the 1850s, when slavery had grown markedly in American society, the United States stood not as a leading exemplar of antislavery sentiment (as it had in the post-Revolutionary era) but as a slave power. Why?²⁹

For one thing, the Revolutionary-era consensus that slavery was a national problem disintegrated. While many whites celebrated slavery’s demise above the Mason-Dixon line, others believed that national abolitionism would actually harm the American republic by liberating hundreds of thousands of southern slaves whom whites deemed indolent and uneducated—a threat to the republican experiment. There was also a major backlash against the results of northern emancipation in the North. Believing that free blacks had corrupted labor values and destabilized the social order above the Mason Dixon line, many whites opposed national emancipation.

Instead, reform-minded slaveholders and their northern allies embraced colonization movements after the War of 1812. Officially brought together under the aegis of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in Washington in December 1816, colonizationists sought to remove free blacks from the United States as a way to spur southern emancipation. Many colonizationists emphasized the voluntary nature of black removal as well as the antislavery nature of the ACS. As an antislavery group, the ACS was only marginally effective. Between the 1810s and 1850s, roughly 10,000 enslaved people were liberated and exported to African settlements via the ACS and its adjuncts (many from Maryland and Virginia). Yet colonization also appealed to many white reformers and politicians because it promised to export free blacks. Indeed, for many Americans, colonization was not merely an antislavery project but a racial one—a program of black removal that would deliver the white republic from the evils of pure abolitionism.³⁰ As a result, African-Americans mobilized against the ACS in cities and towns all along the Atlantic seaboard. Still, colonization grew rapidly. By the 1820s, the ACS had hundreds of auxiliary societies throughout the nation, including thousands of supporters in the North as well as the upper South.

But slavery’s expansion—not its eradication via either abolition or colonization—was the biggest story of the early 1800s. By the 1820s, slavery became a driver of American commercial growth. Though not yet king, cotton illustrated its princely economic power by dominating American exports. Further evidence of slavery’s power occurred in the Mississippi River Valley, where tens of thousands of white settlers flooded territory destined for cotton and sugar production. Cash-crop expansion of this sort necessitated massive environmental alteration of the southwestern landscape and literally hundreds of thousands of black souls. By the late- 1850s, nearly a million enslaved people would be sold “down the river” on the domestic slave trade to fuel the Cotton Kingdom.³¹

In short, even before the advent of radical abolitionism in the 1830s, there was a “great reaction” to abolitionist action in the United States. A sizable contingent of Americans North and South now rejected what might be termed classical abolitionism as a viable part of the future. Rather than planning slavery’s demise alongside black civic uplift, whites North and South saw emancipation without colonization as problematic, while proslavery advocates in the deep South and southwest defended bondage anew. While these trends certainly alarmed abolitionists, they were hard pressed to find an effective reply. In no small way, slavery’s growth, rather than antislavery’s promise, remained the dominant theme of American life until the 1850s.

Enslaved people refused to accept the new status quo. The first decades of the nineteenth century saw a wave of slave rebellions take shape, both near (Virginia, Mississippi, South Carolina) and far (the Caribbean and Latin America). While many white abolitionists still emphasized the expediency of gradualism, enslaved blacks struck more decisive blows for universal freedom. Slave rebels’ defeat of Francophone planters, which led to the birth of the Haitian republic in 1804, set a new standard of black liberty. Throughout the Americas, the legend of Haiti grew. The ripple effects could be felt as far away as Boston, where black leader Prince Hall cited Caribbean freedom struggles as inspiration for a new round of free black militancy in the United States.³²

Like Hall, many African-Americans hoped that militant black protest would spur abolitionist action among whites. The opposite happened: from Haiti to Boston, many whites read black protest as a reason to fear abolitionism of any kind.

RENEWING ANTISLAVERY SENTIMENT IN THE RADICAL 1820s

Although classic abolitionism stalled in the United States during the early 1800s, slavery’s demographic and territorial expansion created a series of crisis moments in American political and social life from the 1820s onward. Many of these confrontations revolved around visions of political antislavery: the notion that the national government must restrict bondage’s future growth in the west. The idea of limiting slavery’s expansion as a form of abolition dated to the 1780s, when American statesmen debated two territorial laws: The Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which passed the Confederation Congress, banned bondage around the present-day Great Lakes; and the Southwest Ordinance, which failed to become law a few years before and would have outlawed slavery’s expansion into the trans-Mississippi southwest. Whether or not the latter law would have withstood the test of time, its failure meant that the cotton and sugar revolutions (not to mention tobacco’s expansion) could occur without major political hurdles in the west. Indeed, by the early 1800s, master brought tens of thousands of enslaved people into Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Kentucky and Tennessee. By 1830, there were twice as many enslaved people in the United States as in the 1790s, and the trend was only going upward.³³

The Missouri Compromise debates of 1819–21 renewed discussion over slavery’s westward fate. Here, antislavery sentiment—the idea that slavery was anathema to the nation’s future—instigated discussions over the federal government’s power to halt bondage in American territories. But sectional power in Congress was equally

at issue. After James Tallmadge of New York proposed slavery restrictions as a condition of Missouri's admission to the Union, northern and southern congressmen fell into angry debate over the slaveholding/non-slaveholding balance of states in Congress. Ultimately, the famous compromise engineered by Kentucky slaveholder Henry Clay admitted Missouri as a slave state, allowed Maine to enter as a free state, and prevented slavery from taking root in federal territories above the 36/30 parallel. But because slavery was not banned in future federal territory below the 36/30 line, some abolitionists believed that the compromise did little to derail bondage's growing power in American politics.³⁴

With such concerns looming, little wonder that the 1820s witnessed a resurgence of abolitionist activism nationally and internationally. Indeed, while they offered the first major example of sectional political confrontation born of antislavery ideas, the Missouri debates also inspired abolitionists to re-examine their struggle. In South Carolina, Denmark Vesey plotted his uprising in 1822 after reading about the Missouri imbroglio; his plan of killing masters and leading an exodus of slave rebels out of the United States toward Haiti indicated that Vesey had little faith in America's emancipation future. But signs of reformers' impatience could be found elsewhere, too. For instance, radical groups of British and African-American abolitionists began pushing for immediate abolition in the post-Missouri era (which coincided with renewed defenses of colonial bondage in Great Britain). For the first time, white as well as black reformers embraced the idea that slavery should be ended at once.³⁵ In addition, black and white abolitionists launched the first sustained antislavery newspapers in the 1820s, including Benjamin Lundy's *Genius of Universal Emancipation* (which printed a wide range of antislavery opinions) and *Freedom's Journal* (the inaugural black newspaper published in New York City between 1827–29). If none of these developments prompted an abolitionist revolution, they did signal an antislavery revival in American culture—a renewed attack on slavery's status in American society.

For African-Americans in particular, slavery's resurgence necessitated a re-examination of abolitionist tactics and strategies. Black reformers, who had once interpreted the ending of the Atlantic slave trade as a millennial moment that might well convince American citizens to slay southern bondage, now realized that slavery had very nearly vanquished abolitionism. Looking back in 1830, black activist Peter Williams told a New York audience that “no people in the world profess so high a respect for liberty and equality as the people of the United States, and yet no people hold so many slaves, or make such great distinctions between man and man.” Like other black activists, Williams enumerated a series of grievances that underscored the ever-widening gap between America's revolutionary rhetoric of “life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness” and slavery's incredible expansion. Not only had bondage grown in ways that made patriots' one-time oppression by Great Britain seem laughable by comparison, Williams asserted, but even free black liberty had been circumscribed in the North. In New York, where slavery had been abolished completely by the state legislature in 1827, freedom had proven “defective,” with restrictions on black voting and civil rights. Elsewhere, free blacks were denied a whole complement of rights, from equal schooling to civil rights in the public realm.³⁶

For a time, many black leaders supported emigrationist programs that would allow African-Americans to depart the United States on their own terms. Unlike the

ACS, emigrationism emphasized the completely voluntary nature of black exodus—African-Americans could go (and return) as they pleased. Over 6,000 blacks emigrated to Haiti during the 1820s. In Philadelphia, Richard Allen began keeping a list of church members who wanted to go to Haiti to escape racism in the US. As he told Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer, he had a list of 500 names eager to ship out for Haitian shores. Similar stories flowed from New York, Baltimore, and Richmond. Even when black emigres returned—disappointed in the economic and social realities confronting them in the Caribbean—black activism was revived by the prospect of global antislavery alliances. Down to the Civil War, blacks would see Haiti as an escape hatch from American racism.³⁷

Returning to the United States, African-Americans redoubled their abolitionist efforts. Black Boston led the abolitionist revival. In 1826, free blacks created perhaps the most dynamic community action group along the Atlantic coast: the General Colored Association (GCA). The group sponsored abolitionist speakers, held debates on antislavery strategies, and distributed antislavery literature to a far-flung network of black activists (including African-American mariners who often stopped in Boston).³⁸ The GCA also gave rise to the radical black pamphleteer David Walker, whose bombastic antislavery work influenced a whole generation of white as well as black reformers (including William Lloyd Garrison, David Ruggles, Maria Stewart, Henry Highland Garnet, and Martin Delany, to name just a few). A free black man from North Carolina, Walker settled in Boston in the 1820s and ran a used clothing shop that catered to black sailors. The store became an entrepot of black activism. Word-of-mouth from black sailors, runaways, and visiting dignitaries (including members of the Haitian government) bolstered Walker's sense of crisis and possibility. Neither slavery nor racism had diminished in American culture, he pointed out in his famous 1829 publication, *Walker's Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*. Calling for massive black uprising—and hinting at slave rebellion—Walker challenged people of color to mobilize nationally. "Remember that your freedom is your natural right," he proclaimed.³⁹

Walker's militant *Appeal* provided a more urgent tone to American antislavery struggles. No longer was abolitionism a moderate cause born of careful planning, but a desperate movement hell-bent on changing the racial status quo. Indeed, even while some white reformers worried about Walker's harsh words, his slashing rhetorical style fit perfectly with the sense of anger besetting Anglo-American abolitionism in the 1830s. In militant, uncompromising language, Walker told Americans what time it was—it was time to scream about slavery's expansion.

ABOLITIONIST TRANSFORMATIONS: THE 1830s

Confirmation of Walker's impact came with the rise of immediate abolitionism in the 1830s. Aggressive, media-savvy, and attuned to the importance of grassroots organizing, immediate abolitionists turned the antislavery struggle into a moral crusade. Hoping to convince American statesmen and citizens to end bondage at once, "modern" abolitionists, as they became known, mastered the art of public relations, picturing slavery (and often times slaveholders) as evil incarnate. More than previous reformers, they flooded American society with antislavery literature, including a broad array of abolitionist newspapers (of which Garrison's *The Liberator*

was only the first). Influenced by the Second Great Awakening, new-style reformers also sent activists into American communities large and small to build abolitionists' popular base. By 1840, well over a thousand antislavery societies existed in the United State, with an aggregate membership of between 200,000 and 300,000. There were juvenile antislavery societies, female antislavery societies, young men's antislavery societies, state, regional and national antislavery societies, all dedicated to ending slavery immediately. As Amos Phelps, a New England preacher who began questioning his colonizationist leanings in the early 1830s, noted after joining the crusade against slavery, immediate abolitionists hoped to revolutionize American antislavery sentiment by getting people to think constantly about slavery's brutality. That meant organizing churches, schools, homes, and neighborhoods. By exerting moral pressure on slaveholders from the ground up, modern abolitionists hoped to create a tidal wave of antislavery opinion that would lead to bondage's demise via abolitionist laws, private manumissions—or both.⁴⁰

For post-1830 reformers, names signaled intent: as new-style “antislavery” advocates, they argued that bondage was immoral and should have no place in American society; in taking this stand, they distinguished themselves from old-style “abolitionists,” who saw slavery as a legitimate legal and political institution that must be dismantled slowly (so as not to upset masters). While “modern” abolitionists pledged to respect southern slaveholders' constitutional rights within the South, they refused to sanction bondage in religious, cultural, or even national political terms. This led them to attack slavery in the most passionate and uncompromising ways. Indeed, whether calling themselves “abolitionists” or “antislavery” adherents, post-1830s race reformers always attacked slaveholding as a sacred and secular sin—something that violated the Bible and Declaration of Independence in equal measure. As famed immediatist Theodore Dwight Weld put it in his 1839 pamphlet, “Slavery As It Is,” modern abolitionists wanted to conduct a vast trial of American slavery, hoping that all Americans would agree that masters and anti-abolitionist politicians were “guilty” of violating the “human rights” of millions of enslaved people.⁴¹

To emphasize the movement's broader sense of purpose, immediatists also confronted race prejudice in the North. For the first time, blacks were acknowledged as “co-adjutors” of the antislavery movement, in the parlance of the day. For instance, *The Liberator* acknowledged the monetary and intellectual contributions of African-Americans, especially during its early days (when black subscribers outpaced whites). And new antislavery groups found black and white activists joining hands to battle both southern slavery and northern racism. In Boston, the new headquarters of abolitionism, black and white reformers formed the nation's first integrated abolitionist group in 1832: The New England Anti-Slavery Society (NEASS). Though racial tensions shadowed the biracial antislavery movement ever after, the NEASS provided a towering example of inter-racial cooperation. Whereas early abolitionist organizations like the PAS did not admit blacks, the NEASS drew a quarter of its founding membership from African-Americans. Other groups followed suit. In 1833, the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society was formed by black and white women in the City of Brotherly Love.⁴² That same year, the American Anti-Slavery Society was formed by black and white activists, the first national antislavery organization with biracial membership.

Over the next several decades, aggressive abolitionism mocked masters and anti-abolitionist politicians as retrograde figures in a world of expanding liberty.⁴³

The example of British emancipation loomed large in this regard. After the British Parliament passed an abolition edict in 1833, ending colonial bondage via a plan of compensated emancipation, abolitionists challenged American political leaders to follow suit. How could a supposedly despotic British nation, abolitionists asked, beat the liberty-loving United States on the freedom front? While they critiqued the British plan (which paid thousands of slaveholders nearly 20 million pounds to liberate roughly 800,000 enslaved people in the Caribbean), black and white abolitionists nevertheless used British Emancipation Day (August 1st, 1834) to draw attention to slavery's further expansion in American life. Renewing the allusive spirit of slave-trade-abolition festivals in the black community, August 1st commemorations praised British emancipation while heaping scorn on American masters. Still, in the 1830s, such celebrations were suffused with optimism as much as pessimism. If abolitionists kept pushing, American reformers believed, antislavery would soon succeed in the United States.⁴⁴

William Lloyd Garrison exemplified the optimistic outlook of post-1830 abolitionism. In the 1820s, Garrison was a moderate abolitionist with colonizationist leanings. After working at Lundy's *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, and imbibing the ringing tones of black activism, Garrison had a moral awakening: both southern slavery and northern racism must be vanquished immediately. He then launched *The Liberator* from Boston, rather than points south (Baltimore or Washington, DC), precisely because he believed that this action would symbolize his seriousness about converting *all* Americans to the wonders of immediate abolitionism. Like other reformers emerging in the 1830s, Garrison believed that Americans had compromised too much with slavery and slaveholders. As a vociferous opponent of both colonization and bondage, Garrison attacked the racial status quo like Walker had: with a sense of abandon. "I will not equivocate," he thundered famously in his opening editorial, "and I will be heard."⁴⁵ And he really believed that his thundering tones would lead to a moral revolution.

Garrison was not alone in expressing such optimism. Abolitionist women helped reshape the antislavery struggle regionally and nationally, believing that their exertions might persuade Americans to rout bondage. A talented corps of women entered the movement in the 1830s as writers, organizers, and fundraisers: Abigail Kelley, Lydia Maria Child, Maria Stewart, Anna Marie Weston, Angelina and Sarah Grimke. Following in the footsteps of Quaker reformer Elizabeth Margaret Chandler, who ran the influential "Ladies Repository" section of Lundy's *Genius of Universal Emancipation* before her untimely death, many antislavery women relied on moral discourses to persuade Americans (especially slaveholding women in the South) to back abolitionism. Drawing on domestic arguments that pictured women as moral authorities in the home, some female antislavery reformers urged women to convert husbands, sons and fathers to the cause. Yet as writers and speakers outside the home, antislavery women became front-rank activists. For instance, Lydia Maria Child served as both a leading author and editor of abolitionist publications, paving the way for subsequent figures like Harriet Beecher Stowe.⁴⁶

Women were instrumental in pushing antislavery sentiment deeper into American civic life. They spearheaded abolitionist petition campaigns, canvassing neighborhoods across the North; in fact, women (and young men) signed the majority of abolitionist memorials to state and federal government.⁴⁷ In geographical terms, women

propelled abolitionism into the west. In Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and other parts of the old Northwest, women became the bedrock of local and state antislavery societies. Ohio activist Betsy Mix Cowles illuminates the powerful impact women had on the western antislavery struggle. A young schoolteacher who believed passionately in abolitionism, Cowles built the Ashtabula Female Anti-Slavery Society into a regional powerhouse. With several hundred members by the mid-1830s, the group impressed abolitionist leaders far and wide. Cowles organized antislavery fundraisers, wrote for the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* (an immediatist periodical based in Salem, Ohio), and challenged Ohio's "black laws" (which denied African-Americans various civil liberties). Like other western women, she came to support both political abolitionism and the Underground Railroad. For many westerners, Cowles was an abolitionist hero.⁴⁸

African-American women also became more visible in the antislavery movement after 1830. In Boston, Maria Stewart, a free black educator who imbibed the lessons of David Walker, challenged African-Americans to mobilize for racial justice anew. She also worked with white reformers to publicize antislavery and educational objectives. The first women to speak before a mixed audience of men and women, Stewart published her work in *The Liberator*, thus inspiring other black women to speak, write, and organize. Indeed, in New York, Providence, Boston, Philadelphia and other places, black women emerged as a galvanizing presence. In Troy, New York, for instance, black women joined with white reformers to form the "Female African Benevolent Society," a charitable group that supported both black uplift in the North and abolitionism in the South. As the group proclaimed in an 1834 pamphlet, free black women should always remember their enslaved sisters in the South, for that would inspire them to keep protesting against racial injustice loudly and publicly.⁴⁹

With such a diverse networks of activists, immediate abolitionism did indeed strike fear into the hearts of slaveholders after 1830. Nevertheless, modern abolitionists' grand designs met with stinging resistance in the North as well as in the South. Abolitionist membership never represented more than a small subset of the American population. And reformers' rhetoric failed to convince most Americans' to condemn either southern slaveholders (whose property rights remained inviolate, most whites agreed) or northern prejudice (which many whites refused to repudiate). In fact, the idea that immediate emancipation in the South might entail black equality in the North prompted a series of anti-abolition riots in the 1830s. Virtually every year, a major confrontation over immediate abolitionism erupted somewhere in America. Perhaps the best-known event occurred in Alton, Illinois in 1837, when antislavery printer Elijah Lovejoy was murdered by an anti-abolitionist mob.

But the worst riot came in May of 1838 with the burning of Pennsylvania Hall in Philadelphia. A glittering edifice constructed by abolitionists to protect antislavery speakers and organizations, the building was destroyed after only four days of operation. No sooner had abolitionists' convened meetings than a massive mob (as big as 3,000 people) gathered outside the building. After ransacking Pennsylvania Hall, the mob attacked black churches and reform organizations in Philadelphia. The violence had a chilling effect locally and nationally. Philadelphia officials, like other northern statesmen, blamed abolitionists for inviting mob violence. Indeed, stirred by rumors of race mixing among the abolitionist faithful, the mob's action illustrated the continuing power of northern prejudice to shape understandings of national abolition. Fears of abolitionist activism haunted Philadelphia for several

decades, as local politicians often refused to let black and white reformers appear together at major public events. Even after the Civil War, Frederick Douglass found it difficult to speak at the American Centennial Exposition in 1876. Philadelphia officials worried that he would prompt a riot. Those fears first took flight in the 1830s with the rise of immediate abolitionism.⁵⁰

ANTISLAVERY REVIVALS IN THE 1840s AND 1850s

While immediate abolitionists did not slay bondage in the 1830s, they engendered wide-ranging discussion of slavery in American culture. The issue was no longer buried. Moreover, even in defeat, the antislavery movement showed an incredible ability to reshape social and political discourses about the broader nature of American slavery and freedom. By bombarding southern communities with antislavery literature in 1835, modern abolitionists compelled governing officials to monitor the mail—spawning questions about white citizens’ rights and liberties. Was the mere possession of abolitionist material a crime, some citizens wondered? In Nashville, abolitionist



Figure 17.1 This 1844 print depicts the escape from slavery of Henry “Box” Brown, who mailed himself from Richmond, Virginia to Philadelphia. Frederick Douglass is at the left holding a claw hammer. Brown’s ordeal was widely publicized, and he became an important symbol in the growing critique of slavery. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC4-4659.

Amos Dresser was accused of distributing incendiary literature (antislavery “pamphlets, papers, etc,” as a local paper noted). He was tried, convicted and whipped before escaping.⁵¹ The lesson for some northerners was that whites might be treated as outlaws for merely expressing antislavery sentiments. Similarly, the flood of petitions arriving in Congress, which resulted in a gag rule on abolitionist discussion between 1836 and 1844, generated heated debate about the meaning of free speech in America. Thus, even if many northerners opposed radical abolition, they nevertheless began to question the power of slavery and slaveholders in American national life, especially during the 1840s and 1850s.

To be sure, abolitionists continued to face considerable obstacles in American culture after 1840. As a result, the antislavery movement fragmented into a variety of groups—political abolitionists, Underground Railroad activists, moral suasionists, social revolutionaries. The first major split in the abolitionist movement occurred in 1840, when a conservative wing of reformers decried the radicalism of Garrisonians. Ostensibly concerned with women’s increasingly visible role in the movement, dissidents registered dismay over a range of issues (including Garrisonians’ opposition to abolitionist political parties). They soon formed their own group: the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (AFASS), largely under the leadership of Arthur and Lewis Tappan. Wealthy and reform-minded brothers in New York City, they had bankrolled immediatist antislavery efforts in the 1830s. But they broke from Garrison. Like the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS), which remained under the leadership of New England abolitionists, the AFASS still believed in moral suasion, especially “Christian” (or less harsh) overtures to the church-going public.

Unlike the AASS, the group favored political abolition. Backing the new Liberty Party in the election of 1840, political abolitionists argued that reformers must use the American party system to build antislavery support inside state and federal governments. Though the Liberty Party garnered a relatively small allegiance (fewer than 10,000 votes in 1840 and under 100,000 in 1844), the AFASS would not relent. As it argued in 1848, by backing politicians who supported the “distinguishing principles of the Liberty Party”—including antislavery readings of the US Constitution—AFASS adherents would intensify antislavery sentiment in the critical realm of American politics. Garrisonians balked, believing that party politics was inherently corrupt. And the Constitution? Garrison famously called it an “agreement with hell and a covenant with death.”⁵² But political abolitionists would eventually gain major supporters in the antislavery struggle, including James McCune Smith, Gerrit Smith, and Frederick Douglass.

Despite disagreements over the best way to build and deploy antislavery sentiment, abolitionist fragmentation may have actually increased antislavery’s visibility in, and impacts on, American culture. By striking out on their own, splinter groups (like political abolitionists) argued more vociferously to persuade Americans that *they* had the best remedy for slavery. Political abolitionists proved particularly effective in the Midwest (stretching from western New York to Wisconsin), where abolitionists saw little problem supporting both the Liberty Party and social protest against bondage. Indeed, from the Liberty Party to the Free Soil Party to the Republican Party, mid-westerners consistently supported antislavery politics on pragmatic grounds—anything that stopped slavery’s growth was worthwhile to them. In a less well-known vein, antislavery figures who favored compensated abolitionism (à la the British model) tried to rally support in the 1850s for an American buyout of southern slave property.

Although compensated abolitionism did not make much impact nationally (even most slaveholders opposed the plan), it too attracted the attention of antislavery Americans otherwise put off by Garrisonian radicalism (he opposed any form of compensation to masters). In this sense, tactical and strategic disagreement among abolitionists turned out to be an unintended benefit. Rather than one primary group of reformers espousing the same plan, antebellum culture confronted waves of activists, each trying desperately to convert Americans to *their* antislavery vision.

Nevertheless, abolitionist activists converged somewhat in the 1850s thanks to two key issues: fugitive slave renditions in the North and slavery's territorial development in the West. Separately, these issues had the potential to galvanize sizable antislavery cohorts; together, they exerted enough pressure on slaveholders that fearful southern radicals openly discussed disunion as the only way to protect bondage. One example among many shows the newfound power of antislavery discourses to undercut the bonds of Union: brothers Percival and Thomas Drayton, the former a Philadelphian, the latter a South Carolina plantation owner, both of whom argued over antislavery in mid-nineteenth-century America. In a series of private letters, the brothers vehemently disagreed not over abolitionism per se (Percival conceded slaveholders' property rights in the South), but rather the growth of antislavery sentiment in the North in the 1850s. Thomas believed that northerners now meant to strangle bondage by protecting fugitive slaves and limiting slavery's western growth; Percival believed that slaveholders were paranoid and out of touch with the march of liberty. The fact that two brothers argued in this way says much about the newfound power of sectionalized antislavery sentiment in American culture in the years preceding the Civil War.⁵³

For Thomas Drayton and many southern masters, fugitive slaves had long been a sticking point. They knew that black restiveness at home was a perennial problem, even if outright slave rebellion remained rare after 1840. Scholars still debate the size and scope of fugitive slave escapes.⁵⁴ Thousands of enslaved people escaped from the South before the Civil War, with many fleeing after a stronger fugitive slave law was passed in 1850 (which essentially deputized northerners to aid in fugitive slave renditions under penalty of fines and/or jail time). Detroit, Buffalo, Cleveland, Rochester, New York, Philadelphia, and Boston all served as key corridors of runaway activity, making clear that a steady stream of escapees would always exit the House of Bondage. Many went to British Canada, which banned bondage (white reformers estimated that there were roughly 20,000–30,000 ex-slaves there).⁵⁵ Yet whatever their overall number, fugitives paled in comparison to slavery's expansion. Still, if runaway slave activity was not a major economic threat, it did negatively impact both plantation discipline and masters' positive picture of southern bondage. Slaveholders therefore wanted to crack down on runaways at every turn.

During the 1840s and 1850s, however, masters had more difficulty reclaiming runaways. Many fugitive slave renditions occurred with little trouble—but there were plenty of troubling examples where masters had been confronted, stymied, or even assaulted. Virtually every northern state had a celebrated fugitive slave case after 1840—Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, New York, Iowa, Michigan, Massachusetts. In Syracuse in 1851, black and white abolitionists liberated a captured fugitive slave named William Henry (known as “Jerry”) by breaking into the jail where he had been housed; after “Jerry’s” escape to Canada, dozens of reformers were arrested, but only one person was convicted. In Philadelphia four years later, enslaved woman

Jane Johnson escaped when local abolitionists confronted her North Carolina master on the city's docks, claiming that she had a right to liberty in Pennsylvania; no one intervened on the master's behalf and, while abolitionist Passmore Williamson spent several months in prison, he became a celebrity locally and nationally before being released (Johnson was never re-enslaved). In Ohio, the Oberlin–Wellington “rescue” of 1857 made heroes of several local whites who liberated a kidnapped free black man from southern slave patrollers. Even the 1854 Anthony Burns imbroglio in Boston, which resulted in the fugitive Burns’ return to Virginia slavery, compelled many local citizens to oppose slave catchers: abolitionists bragged that no runaway was ever captured in Boston again.

The bonds of antislavery sympathy built by abolitionists were critical in this regard. During the 1840s and 1850s, black and white abolitionists made antislavery literature generally, and the slave narrative genre in particular, key parts of their activist portfolio. The results were electrifying. Although slave narratives had existed since the 1700s, advances in print technology made them more popular than ever

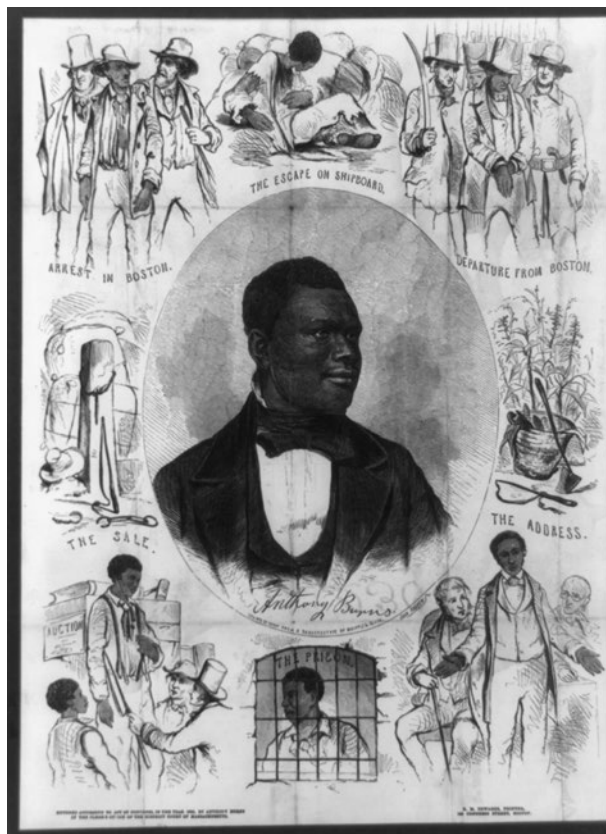


Figure 17.2 This 1855 print commemorates the life and ordeal of the fugitive slave Anthony Burns. His escape to Boston, arrest, trial, and return to slavery touched off rioting and fueled growing northern opposition to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-90750.

by the antebellum era, when hundreds of such stories hit the literary market. Slave narratives became bestsellers, creating a publicity wave that masters found hard to ignore. Frederick Douglass's first autobiography, published in 1845 in Boston, sold 5,000 copies, and publishers in England, Scotland, and Ireland soon issued their own editions of Douglass's text. When Douglass authored a second autobiography in Rochester in 1855, it sold even more copies: 18,000 in two years.

In the hands of skilled authors like Harriet Jacobs, Henry Bibb, Solomon Northrup, William Wells Brown, and others, slave narratives were not just personal stories of enslaved peoples' woes, but grand morality tales about the battle between good and evil in American culture. Using emotional literary devices derived from trans-Atlantic Romanticism, slave narrators invited Americans to vicariously experience bondage. Their tales literally broke through the page and asked readers what *they* would do if enslaved? Aimed at an increasingly literate Northern middle-class readership, slave narratives created a cultural wedge between northerners and southerners. By the 1850s, many southerners could not understand why northerners tolerated what they saw as tall tales about bondage. But even northerners who claimed no formal anti-slavery allegiance found slave narratives compelling. By illuminating injustice in American lands, slave narratives challenged northerners to break the bonds of affection that southern masters had long relied on to maintain slavery. Thus, when runaway slaves made their way into northern cities and towns, they entered landscapes already shaped by antislavery literature.⁵⁶

Further evidence of this fact came in the form of a best-selling novel: Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). The book stirred the passions of Americans everywhere by creating a series of indelible characters mired in the horrors of bondage: sympathetic (and Christian) slaves like Uncle Tom, noble runaways like Eliza, and evil masters like Simon Legree. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold hundreds of thousands of copies in its first year alone and spawned a series of cultural spin-offs, from playing cards to board games. But slaveholders were not amused by Stowe's masterpiece, debunking it as a fiction of southern bondage. In a subsequent "Key" to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe replied that slave narratives informed her tragic tale. Many northerners took Stowe's side—an emotional affiliation with antislavery forces that truly alarmed southern politicians. And that was a major step forward in abolitionist circles.⁵⁷

A similar tale of northern transformation occurred in the political realm, where antislavery parties had traditionally attracted little mainstream support and abolitionist legislation often failed to win the day. Despite abolitionist maneuvering, for instance, slaveholding Texas had entered the Union in 1845 and the Wilmot Proviso (proposed in 1846 by Pennsylvania's David Wilmot to prevent slavery from taking root in any territory acquired in the Mexican War) failed to pass Congress. Nevertheless, political antislavery grew steadily at midcentury, impacting northern attitudes about bondage. For one thing, Liberty Party advocates mobilized enough New Yorkers in 1844 to swing the Empire State's electoral votes away from slaveholding Whig Henry Clay. Although another slaveholder (James K. Polk) won, antislavery forces saw for the first time their power to disrupt national politics. For another, Free Soilers' belief that the west should remain free of bondage became a rallying cry of many northern citizens before the Civil War.

Indeed, after 1848, antislavery political forces gained momentum at the state and federal level.⁵⁸ If the passage of the Kansas Nebraska Act in 1854, which destroyed

the Missouri Compromise and ostensibly opened the entire west to slavery, proved worrisome, the growth of antislavery politics more generally cheered many abolitionists. Indeed, the advent of the Republican Party in the middle of the decade drew together antislavery voters in a powerful new way. A collection of antislavery Democrats, disaffected (and moralistic) Whigs, and politically minded abolitionists, the Republican Party vowed to stop slavery's spread west. "On that point," Abraham Lincoln famously told fellow Republicans in 1860, "hold firm, as with a chain of steel."⁵⁹ By then, Lincoln knew that non-extension of slavery was a winning political strategy. It had allowed northerners to adopt antislavery policies gradually, rather than confront slavery suddenly.

But some Republicans also had grander plans of choking domestic slavery out of existence through time by, among other things, using federal power to curb bondage in federally controlled areas and by encouraging the border states to adopt gradual abolition schemes. Little wonder the Republican Party appealed to a wide swath of northern voters: it offered something to moderates as well as radicals along the anti-slavery spectrum. Indeed, when the swashbuckling explorer John C. Fremont captured roughly a third of the popular vote for Republicans in the election of 1856, the new party realized that it had staying power in American politics. By the early 1860s, that staying power translated into real political power. Republicans had won gubernatorial elections in Indiana, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania, controlled over 100 seats in Congress, and grabbed the prestigious Speakership of the House of Representatives.⁶⁰

Despite this impressive growth, stalwart abolitionists remained skeptical of the Republican Party right up to the Civil War. Some reformers believed that militant action, rather than savvy electioneering, was required to slay slavery. John Brown's famous raid of the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry in October 1859 proved that some reformers were willing to adopt physical means to kill bondage. Though he declined to join Brown's raid, Frederick Douglass also came to believe in a righteous millennialism that saw physical force as a necessary element of any future emancipation struggle.

All the same, even militant abolitionists like Brown won sympathy in northern culture.⁶¹ Not only were proslavery political and legal decisions challenged as evidence of a seeming slave power conspiracy—notably the Supreme Court's 1857 *Dred Scott* decision, which threatened to nationalize slaveholders' property rights—but hardcore abolitionists consistently discovered ways to revivify their cause beyond the activist ranks. Following John Brown's raid, Lydia Maria Child publicly defended the radical abolitionist's struggle against slavery even as she deplored his violent tactics. Corresponding with Virginia politicians and their wives, she critiqued bondage as a gross violation of religious, political, and filial compacts that treated African-Americans like animals. "Looking at the system of slavery in the light of all this evidence," she charged, "do you candidly think we deserve 'two-fold damnation' for detesting it?"⁶² Bundled into a pamphlet and published in 1860, Child's exchange with southerners over John Brown's status as a freedom fighter sold 300,000 copies. It was the most popular thing she ever wrote. "In her own way," as her biographer puts it, "Child had joined Brown in mobilizing the North for a war against slavery."⁶³

Abolitionists were not naïve about the power of antislavery sentiment. They knew that emancipation itself would be very difficult to achieve in the United States. But as William Lloyd Garrison noted on several occasions, a change had surely occurred in Northern public opinion by the 1860s. Abolitionists now had to move with, as

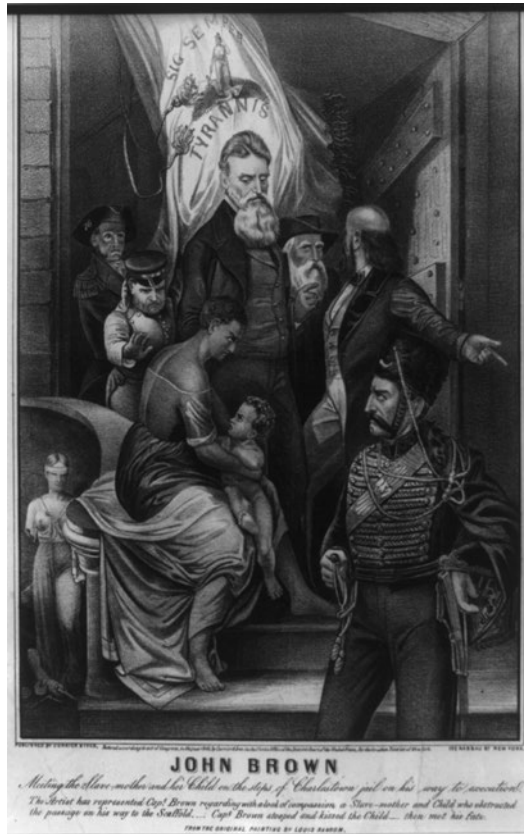


Figure 17.3 This 1863 Currier and Ives print depicts John Brown as a kindly, paternal, and heroic figure. Published at the height of the Civil War, and only four years after Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry, the print conveys the unbridgeable divide between proslavery and antislavery forces that had emerged by the end of the 1850s. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-2890.

opposed to against, northerners' antislavery views of southern secession and sectional war. Though no advocate of mealy-mouthed antislavery slogans, Garrison even expressed a willingness to support Republicans. For Samuel J. May, a Garrisonian stalwart, Republicans' antislavery gradualism (i.e., the idea of stopping slavery's future growth as a way of strangling southern bondage) was not perfect, but it did offer an antislavery direction for national politics. By working with Republicans, he told Garrison, abolitionists could help shape that antislavery program—beginning with non-extension in the territories and perhaps ending with emancipation in federally controlled areas like the District of Columbia. And that would eventually lead to slavery's demise.⁶⁴ Moreover, by backing Republicans, abolitionists like May hope to finally enjoy the support of many northerners.

Not everyone in the abolitionist movement agreed with Garrison and May's assessment. In 1859, the Massachusetts Antislavery Society split over supporting the Republican Party. African-Americans were also ambivalent. While some black activists

hailed the Republican cause, others worried that the colonizationist musings of several party leaders—including Abraham Lincoln—would undercut abolitionism. Nevertheless, as sectional battles intensified and then turned to war, many black and white abolitionists rallied to the Republican standard. “When I remember that we have now nearly reached the culmination of our greatest struggle,” Garrison himself observed in 1864, “I do not feel disposed . . . to say anything very harshly against Abraham Lincoln.”⁶⁵ At last, Garrison argued, general antislavery sentiment was turning into an abolitionist reality throughout American society. And that was a wondrous thing.

AN ANTISLAVERY REPUBLIC?

And so we can return to Lincoln’s rousing Gettysburg Address, which not only mourned mass death in the Civil War, but also honored years of abolitionist struggle in the United States. Like the nation itself, Lincoln had changed much by the 1860s. Once a Free Soiler who had supported slaveholders’ rights in the South and the colonization of free blacks in the North, Lincoln came to see the Civil War as a millennial event that compelled Americans to transcend racial injustices past, present, and future. A man who once fled from the label of “Black Republican,” he now happily consorted with black and white abolitionists, giving them much credit for laying the ideological foundation for Civil War freedom. As he noted repeatedly after issuing the final Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863, there must be no return to “the Union as it was”: a nation dominated by the twin evils of slavery and mastery—a nation where for so many years abolitionist were viewed as subversives. Rather, there must be a “New Birth of Freedom,” one that required Americans to simultaneously look forward (to an emancipated American Republic) and backward (to the great promises of Revolutionary freedom). Not only did Americans need to bury the heroic soldiers who died in the Civil War, they needed to bury their checkered association with abolitionism and racial equality.

Needless to say, that last matter proved much harder to achieve. Indeed, maintaining the abolitionist republic that Lincoln celebrated and came to symbolize would require still more activism among abolitionists and their heirs, not only in the post-Civil War, but even into our own time.⁶⁶

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Andrew Shankman for a deft editorial touch and unending patience and my colleagues in abolitionist studies who continue to inspire, inform and teach us all.

NOTES

- 1 Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, November 19, 1863, available at: www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm.
- 2 The group was initially called “The Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage”; after it was reformed in the 1780s, the organization took on its more familiar name: “The Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage,” or the Pennsylvania Abolition Society.

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- 7 Jefferson, “Notes on the State of Virginia” (1785), 289, available online at: <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=JefVirg.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=all>.
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- 13 See Sarter’s essay in Nash, *Race and Revolution*, 168–70.
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- 15 Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2006).
- 16 See Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*. See also Richard Newman and James Mueller, eds., *Antislavery and Abolition in Philadelphia* (Baton Rouge, 2011).
- 17 “Pennsylvania Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery, March 1, 1780,” reprinted in Kaminski, *A Necessary Evil?*, 13–14.
- 18 Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, chapter 3.
- 19 See Richard Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York, 2008), 111.
- 20 The classic treatment of African-American protest in Philadelphia remains Gary B. Nash’s *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia’s Black Community, 1720–1840* (Cambridge, 1988).
- 21 See “An Address to the Public from the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery” (Philadelphia, 1789).
- 22 See “Notes on the State of Virginia,” at <http://web.archive.org/web/20110221130550/http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=JefVirg.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=all>, 264–5.

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- 38 See Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of the Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park, PA, 1996).
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- 42 See John Van Horne and Jean Fagin Yellin, eds, *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women’s Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, 1994).
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- 64 On May's agreement with Garrison, see Henry Mayer's *All on Fire* (New York, 1998), 454–57.
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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE WORLD THE SLAVEHOLDERS CRAVED

Proslavery Internationalism in the 1850s



Matthew Karp

The history of ideas does not always lend itself to rich imagery, but when the subject is the proslavery thinker in the antebellum South, a vivid portrait readily conjures itself into being. The proslavery intellectual is dour, feverish, anxiety-ridden. Barricaded in his Virginia or South Carolina parlor, he finds himself isolated from both his own culture and the main currents of the modern world, and yet he remains urgently engaged with the problems of that world. He reads the latest European thinkers and glories in the miracles of steam and rail, but denounces the cancers of free society and trembles at the monstrous ideologies of the Age of Revolution. Lonely and often lugubrious, he is also manically expressive and sometimes vehemently confident in the force of his own ideas. More Romantic than reactionary, perhaps, he nevertheless maintains a fierce ambivalence about the nature of progress; wears a pessimistic face toward an uncertain future, and nurtures passionate hallucinations about a past golden age that never was. Caught between tradition and modernity, above all he gropes desperately for order.

The availability of this portrait, at once dazzling and subtle, is a tribute to the brilliant scholarship that has illuminated proslavery thought in the past several decades. In fact Eugene Genovese, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Drew Gilpin Faust, and Michael O'Brien, among others, have exploded old myths, discovered new paradoxes, and offered richly competitive interpretations of the Old South's intellectual world that no caricatured portrait can truly capture.¹ Yet for all their disagreements about the nature of southern thought, in the general realm of politics—and the particular fiefdom of proslavery ideology—these scholars have largely left the anxious, conservative character of the proslavery thinker unchanged.² There are many good reasons for their decision, for proslavery writers *were* often anxious in temper, and they nearly always identified themselves as social conservatives. Under the direct assault of Northern antislavery, and the indirect challenge of transatlantic liberalism, defenders of bondage often assumed a jittery, defensive crouch—"an uncomfortable posture," as Lacy Ford has written, "comparable to that of a coiled snake, at once defensive and aggressive, frightened yet menacing."³

But as historians expand our perspective on what we now recognize as an acutely international relationship between slavery, capitalism, and the Old South, it is perhaps

time to reconsider this temperamental assessment.⁴ Within the arena of antebellum southern politics, it may even be time to re-evaluate the ideological category of “proslavery conservatism” itself. In a world of revolutionary political and economic change, proslavery leaders have generally been classed as conservatives because they remained committed to what their critics and future generations saw as an obviously antiquated social order. Even for many scholars who stress the progressive dimensions of southern thought, slaveholders’ entrenched belief in racial hierarchy and coercive labor often appear as problematic exceptions to their general embrace of modernity—awkward social facts that must be reconciled, through difficult ideological contortions, with the liberal individualism of the nineteenth century. The southern elite’s “progressive” inclinations toward republican politics, economic development, and technical innovation, from this perspective, must have generated an inevitable tension with the “conservative” tendencies within the system of slavery itself.⁵

This framework owes itself, in part, to the internal preoccupations of a generation of southern historians. Beginning with the social reality of slavery, scholars in the 1970s and 1980s worked their way outward toward its more complex ideological justifications: “The proslavery argument,” wrote Kenneth Greenberg in 1985, “was the attempt to resolve in thought the contradiction embedded in Southern social life.”⁶ Thus anchored in the material world of the US South, historians very naturally understood the proslavery mentality of the antebellum period in light of the internal evolutions of American society.⁷ From this predominantly national perspective, scholars tended to explain antebellum proslavery arguments as, first, an anxious response to a series of hostile social and political events; and, second, a conservative reaction against the liberal and republican attitudes of the post-Revolutionary era. To the extent that external or international forces entered the picture, they usually helped confirm this paradigm. European revolutions, Caribbean emancipations, and the larger transatlantic movements toward nationalism, liberalism, and industrialization—these merely further underlined the isolation, and the vulnerable conservatism, of the proslavery southerner.⁸

This linked emphasis on social contradiction and ideological reaction, evident in the work of both political and intellectual historians, helped produce a wonderfully nuanced explanation of the proslavery worldview in antebellum America. It has proved less successful, however, in relating that worldview to the broader nineteenth-century world. As scholars in the past decade have sought, more than ever, to extend the geographic boundaries of American history, the relationship between slavery and nineteenth-century modernity takes on a different cast.⁹ Southern ideas about racial hierarchy and coerced labor, in particular, begin to seem less isolated and less antithetical to the “progressive” civilization of the age.

Surveying the globe in the 1850s, slaveholders themselves certainly found reason for optimism. In the United States, to be sure, the omens were not all good: the Compromise of 1850 made slaveholding states a minority in the Union; a powerful antislavery coalition in the North sought with increasing success to limit, isolate, and weaken slavery at home. Yet in an international context, as proslavery advocates eagerly observed, the principles that undergirded slavery were experiencing a major renaissance. Racial hierarchy and coerced labor were not on the wane—they were rapidly expanding all over the world. Global free trade had lubricated a far-flung

system of economic exchange, critically and unavoidably dependent on unfree agricultural labor: Brazilian coffee, Cuban sugar, and American cotton were all booming as never before. With each passing year, the equalitarian logic of emancipation was repudiated ever more forcefully by the rhetoric of the European press and the activity of European governments. And the spread of apprentice and coolie work systems across the Atlantic world reflected the undeniable truth that hierarchy and coercion were, after all, ideas with a future.¹⁰

Slavery, in this view, was not an impediment to modernity, but an expedient. It did not merely insulate the South from the turbulence of free labor societies, with their fractious politics, explosive class conflicts, and bizarre social deviations. It also propelled the South to the front rank of nations, and placed the southern elite in the vanguard of modern development. While many defenders of bondage, throughout the 1850s, continued to rely on arguments that emphasized the conservative, organic, and paternalistic features of slave labor, a broad and influential strain of thought depicted slavery as highly flexible, modern, and efficient. Embraced by many of proslavery's canonical thinkers, this style of argument found even greater resonance among the wide array of internationally minded journalists and politicians who, if not intellectuals in a classic sense, nevertheless represented the dominant tendencies of slaveholding thought. Rather than dwell plaintively on the South's increasing weakness and confinement within the United States, this broad group of proslavery boosters expanded the geographic parameters and found comfort in the latest developments all around the globe. The blessings of free trade, the failure of emancipation, the necessity of coerced labor—all these reflected the triumph of the South's 'domestic' institution, ideologically if not yet practically liberated from the stern boundaries of domestic politics.

"The world will fall back upon African labor, governed and owned in some shape or form by the white man," predicted one of proslavery's most enthusiastic tribunes in 1853: "This is the true progress of civilization."¹¹ For its boldest advocates, slavery was not a fortress for the South to protect itself against modernity, but the irresistible engine that drove modernity forward.

* * *

Among the many global sources of proslavery confidence in the late antebellum years, perhaps the most tangible was the rapid spread of free trade. In 1846, Great Britain abolished its restrictive Corn Laws, opening its domestic market to foreign grains, and triggering a volley of tariff liberalization and commercial reform on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.¹² As the movement toward free trade gained momentum, southern elites hailed their own central role in an unprecedented era of open international exchange. The "four articles most necessary to modern civilization," the South's leading commercial magazine declared in 1851, were "sugar, coffee, cotton, tobacco." All of these, of course, were slave-grown goods; and all of them, in the 1850s, faced fewer obstacles than ever in their circulation through global markets. For proslavery southerners, the mid-nineteenth century might be an age of free trade, but free trade itself rested on a foundation of bound labor.¹³

The repeal of the Corn Laws, in fact, came a year after earlier British reductions in tariffs on imported sugar and cotton. John C. Calhoun, the great South Carolina

defender of slavery, was hardly the only southerner paying close attention to these reforms. Writing to a northern friend in 1845, he cheered British progress toward free trade, and correctly predicted further tariff reductions in the future: “They have already succeeded in repealing the duty on cotton . . . & will not stop until they repeal them on food . . . In repealing, they look to the foreign trade; and when it shall be fully effected, & low duties & free trade become the established policy.”¹⁴

The context for such optimism about British free trade was, initially, the domestic political battle over US tariffs: Calhoun hoped that lower British duties would offer a structural and ideological boost to the free trade cause in America. 1846, indeed, proved to be a year of transatlantic tariff reductions: in July, the same month Parliament finally repealed the Corn Laws, the US Congress passed its own package of trade reforms. A centerpiece of President James K. Polk’s domestic agenda, the 1846 reform bill did not quite realize the laissez-faire utopia longed for by some southern elites. But it did roll back the most dramatic hikes in the 1842 tariff, while significantly lowering rates on a broad range of imports.¹⁵ For Polk and many of his southern allies, the Corn Law repeal and the US reductions had together ushered in a new era of international economic cooperation. Britain’s willingness to admit “three-fourths of the articles of our domestic exports comparatively free of duty,” argued Virginia Congressman Thomas Bayly, proved that commercial restrictions were “the relics of a dark and feudal age.” In his annual message for 1846, the President also struck an optimistic note: “the simultaneous abandonment of the protective policy by Great Britain and the United States” would ultimately lead the “other Powers of Europe” to “pursue a similar policy.”¹⁶

Additional developments on the other side of the Atlantic vindicated both Calhoun and Polk’s prediction regarding a future world of international free trade. For over a decade, Britain had levied much higher duties on foreign, slave-grown sugar than on the produce of emancipated black labor in its West Indian colonies. But in 1846, new Prime Minister, the Whig leader John Russell, acted aggressively to extend and deepen the previous year’s tentative sugar tariff cuts. After a contentious debate, Parliament approved Russell’s sweeping sugar bill in August, opening the British market to more competition from slave-grown sugar from Cuba and Louisiana.¹⁷ The sugar bill was only the beginning of Russell’s assault on long-standing British trade restrictions. In 1849, he and his Whig allies successfully abolished the bulk of the Navigation Acts, which, since the seventeenth century, had forbidden the importation of certain goods (including sugar and tobacco) on foreign ships. Once again, southern elites were watching closely. “The repeal of the most objectionable parts of the navigation laws, just now effected by Lord John Russell,” summed up the *Southern Quarterly Review*, “with the repeal of the corn laws, by Sir Robert Peel, constitute the most important and beneficent acts of legislation of the present century.”¹⁸

By 1849, the push for international free trade had spread far beyond Britain’s shores. Commercial regulations seemed to be loosening all across Western Europe: during the late forties, Belgium, the Netherlands, Prussia, Piedmont, Switzerland, and other states took significant steps toward dismantling their systems of protection. In 1853, an exultant US Treasury Secretary James Guthrie added “Portugal, Brazil, Austria, Spain, Russia, Cuba, the Zoll Verein, Chili . . . Norway, Mexico, and Sweden” to the list of states that had liberalized their trade laws.¹⁹ On three continents and

in two hemispheres, the consensus among modern “commercial countries” seemed clear: the global marketplace of goods must not be impeded by clumsy and regressive tariff restrictions. Guthrie, a proudly free trading, slaveholding Kentuckian, looked forward to the day when the power of commerce would tie all “the nations of the earth in stronger bonds of peace by mutual benefits.”²⁰

Across the 1850s, as tariffs shrank while cotton prices soared, southern elites looked to the international marketplace with more confidence than in any previous era in the history of the republic. Yet for many thoughtful southern observers, this was more than just a great time to get rich. The ongoing transformation of commerce, some argued, reflected the vital importance of slave-grown goods in the new global economy. For all their power, the world’s most advanced industrial societies—Great Britain, France, the northern United States—remained critically dependent on key agricultural staples. In fact, the more rapidly they industrialized, the more dependent they became.

This was not necessarily a new idea. “[T]he great source of the wealth, prosperity, and power of the more civilized Nations of the Temperate Zone,” Calhoun had declared in 1844, “depends, in a great degree, on the exchange of their products with those of the tropical regions . . . Those who can best succeed in commanding those markets have the best prospect of outstripping all the others in the career of commerce, navigation, manufactures, wealth, and power.” From his diplomatic post in rapidly industrializing Brussels, Calhoun’s son-in-law Thomas Clemson was even more blunt in 1845: “[i]t is Cotton & Tobacco mainly the first that vivifies the commerce of the world.” The rise of international free trade in the 1850s intensified this conviction. Clemson’s judgment came on the heels of a commercial treaty he had recently negotiated with Belgium: a sign, he hoped, that free trade might soon sweep across the European continent.²¹ As these prophecies were realized, southern boosters grew ever more flush with confidence. “The wonder perhaps of this 19th century,” pronounced an 1856 pamphlet reprinted in several southern journals, “is the *value of cotton, and its achievements*. Iron and cotton, mostly cotton, drove England’s *corn laws* to the wall, and introduced cheaper bread to her starving millions.”²²

Faalty to King Cotton did not preclude slaveholders from paying homage to a wide variety of agricultural potentates, all of them produced by slaves and distributed by an increasingly free global commerce. Sugar, coffee, and other goods were essential, too.²³ The combined vitality of a range of slave-grown goods helped convince many southerners that world opinion on slavery itself was beginning to shift. For many confident proslavery internationalists, the central piece of evidence was not King Cotton but the supposed failure of black emancipation on the sugar islands of the West Indies. In the 1850s, this became a major theme of proslavery writing.

* * *

During the second quarter of the nineteenth century, slave labor appeared to be in a hemispheric retreat. Britain emancipated its West Indian slaves in 1833, and France and Denmark did the same after the revolutions of 1848. In Central and South America, over the same period, slavery was either banned outright or so constrained as to produce an obvious and irreversible decline.²⁴ Yet by 1850 there were, perhaps,

some signs of an international “counter current, or slavery principle,” as the Virginia proslavery theorist George Fitzhugh called it. He was not the only southerner to crow about the supposed economic failure of the free labor experiment in Jamaica, Barbados, and the rest of the West Indies. Sugar production on those islands dropped precipitously after emancipation, as the newly free black workers withdrew their labor from the plantations. Britain’s need for tariffs to protect West Indian sugar against slave-grown competition in Cuba and the United States demonstrated the frailty of the free labor system; the abandonment of those tariffs after 1846 showed that even its antislavery sponsors would no longer make sacrifices to prolong the experiment.²⁵

As British opinion soured on West Indian emancipation, southern editors eagerly spread the word. The New Orleans publisher James D.B. DeBow may have been the most enthusiastic connoisseur of British skepticism about black freedom. During the fall of 1857, for just one example, four consecutive issues of *DeBow’s Review* contained anti-abolitionist quotations from the *London Times*. But DeBow was hardly alone. When the Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle composed an essay on the “Negro Question” in the West Indies, his cynical remarks on the capacity of free black labor made their way into southern journals from Richmond to Tallahassee.²⁶ The *Southern Quarterly Review’s* 1853 assessment, complete with extended quotations from Lord Stanley, a member of Parliament who had visited the colonies, summed up the situation: “The bright anticipations of the social improvement and material prosperity of [the] West India Islands, must now give place to the melancholy realities of her degradation and ruin caused by this act of her folly, and England must feel painfully conscious that her effort was wasted upon the African race. . . . The truth is, the measure has utterly failed of all its purposes . . .”²⁷

Beyond the British West Indies, proslavery commentators scanned the global headlines for evidence of free labor’s inability to compete with slavery in the production of key staple goods. One 1849 article in the *Charleston Mercury* noted the course of slave emancipation in South Africa, where the British government had forced its Dutch colonists to unshackle their black bondsmen. The result was social mayhem and economic disaster: “forthwith, the Hottentot, by nature one of the most indolent of animals, suporned work, and took to idleness and dram-drinking.” Both Dutch and English society in South Africa had only begun to reckon with the destructive consequences of emancipation. By the late 1850s, as the international proslavery argument picked up momentum, references to failure of abolition in Africa became more common. After emancipation, argued Georgia’s T.R.R. Cobb in 1858, Cape Colony’s “agricultural interests have suffered for want of laborers, and the farms have run to waste. The same effects followed the Emancipation Act at Mauritius.”²⁸

DeBow’s collaborator Thomas Prentice Kettell offered perhaps the most comprehensive critique of the global experiment with free labor. Brandishing statistics that showed a 50 percent drop in French West Indian sugar exports from 1847 to 1848, Kettell declared that the consequences of emancipation had been “the same as in Jamaica, viz., a prompt abandonment of work at any price.” New antislavery ordinances in the colonies of Denmark and Sweden, and “in Tunis, Egypt, and Bohemian Wallachia,” proved no more successful. According to Kettell, all this successful free labor pressure, in both the Caribbean and Mediterranean basins, led only to barbarism

in the former and continued despotism in the latter, as the newly freed bondpeople were unable to maintain agricultural export levels. Such a wide range of proofs for the failure of global abolition only strengthened the international economic position of slavery. The iron laws of economics, Kettell argued, “bound the fortunes of American slaves so firmly to human progress, that civilization itself may almost be said to depend upon the continual servitude of the blacks in America.”²⁹

In the 1850s, then, European elites seemed to be embracing global free trade at the same time as they recoiled from global free labor, with both movements of this interlocking process confirming the triumph of slavery on the world stage. To be sure, even the most optimistic proslavery internationalists recognized that Great Britain, especially, was not quite ready to repudiate emancipation. Through the 1850s, to their scorn and dismay, the cultural power of British abolitionism remained vigorous, even as its political influence declined.³⁰ Yet southerners grabbed eagerly at signs that economic necessity would, eventually, overwhelm the lingering remnants of antislavery feeling. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, for instance, resonated strongly with British audiences, but proslavery observers sought and found reason to believe that business-minded Britons were not fully swayed by its sentimental abolitionism. “[A]s a nation,” the *London Times* noted in 1857, in a passage reprinted by the Georgia-based *Southern Cultivator*, “we are abolitionists, *fete* Mrs. Stowe, cry over her books, and pray for an anti-slavery President. . . . But all this time we are clothing not only ourselves, but all the world besides, with very cotton picked by Uncle Tom. . . . We are Mr. Legree’s agents for the manufacture and sale of his cotton crop. Should anything happen to Mr. Legree . . . we shall all be ruined, and shall have to take our place in the second rank of nations.” The *Southern Cultivator* pointed to this evidence that Britain was “opening its eyes” and beginning to acknowledge its true “interests.” Hard-headed economic realism would eventually triumph over abolitionist emotion.³¹

Many of the South’s most prominent and influential proslavery thinkers came to the same hopeful conclusion. “[T]he tide of abolition fanaticism has begun to ebb everywhere,” declared James Henry Hammond in 1858. The health of the world economy, even in places where abolitionism lasted, depended too much on the spread of coerced black workers to “every spot on the surface of the globe” where key commodities were produced. “The nations cannot part with [slavery],” Hammond’s friend William Gilmore Simms reassured his readers in *The Southern Quarterly Review*. “It is their life, and the very soul of the policy that saves.”³²

George Fitzhugh, characteristically, elaborated on this point at even greater length. His 1856 book *Cannibals All!* is best remembered as a daring and at times outlandish defense of slaveholding paternalism against the incursions of a heartless free market.³³ Yet for all Fitzhugh’s qualms about the emerging liberal economic order, he did not hesitate to defend slave labor as an integral component of that order. In *Cannibals All!*, his capsule history of slavery and abolition reflected a broad optimism about the symbiotic relationship between forced labor and global capitalism. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Fitzhugh recounted, abolitionists notched a number of notable successes, as “the slaves of most of South America, of the West Indies, and of Mexico were liberated.” But these victories proved temporary, because the global economy was moving decisively in the opposite direction: “in the meantime, cotton, rice, sugar, coffee, tobacco, and other products of slave labor, came into

universal use as necessities of life. The population of Western Europe, sustained and stimulated by those products, was trebled, and that of the North increased ten fold." Emancipating the world's remaining slaves thus became unthinkable; it would mean starving the richest and most dynamic regions of the planet. To extend black slavery, on the other hand, would be to unleash the productive power of the global marketplace: "If all South America, Mexico, the West Indies, and our Union south of Mason and Dixon's line, of the Ohio and Missouri, were slaveholding, slave products would be abundant and cheap in free society: and their market for their merchandise, manufactures, commerce, &c illimitable."³⁴

A belief in the basic necessity of forced labor provided the common foundation for a diverse range of proslavery arguments, from the most antique paternalism to the most aggressive market fundamentalism. (Sometimes, as in the case of George Fitzhugh, that diversity was contained within the writings of a single individual.) In all centuries and on all continents, the orderly progress of a civilization depended on its ability to procure—and thus, necessarily, to coerce—the labor power of its working classes. "In all social systems there must be a class to do the menial duties," declared James Henry Hammond in his famous 1858 "Mud-sill" speech in the Senate. "The Senator from New York said yesterday that the whole world had abolished slavery. Aye, the *name*, but not the *thing*; all the powers of the earth cannot abolish that." "Where a man is compelled to labor at the will of another," wrote William Harper, the dean of proslavery South Carolinians, ". . . there *slavery* exists; and it is immaterial by what sort of compulsion the will of the laborer is subdued."³⁵

This was proslavery social philosophy, derived at great pains and often at great length from the fundamental laws of History, of Nature, and of God. But in the 1850s, it was also proslavery current affairs, derived less grandly, but perhaps just as influentially, from close observation of international relations, international politics, and the world labor market. The proslavery critique of free labor society—especially, of course, the free labor society of the North—has long occupied the focus of historians, and for good reason. Hammond and Harper, among many others, directed their fire at Senators, capitalists, and philanthropists across the Northern states who pretended to believe that the wage labor system had "abolished" coercion. This claim was the central debating ground in antebellum arguments about the morality of slavery versus free labor, and the conflict over which system of political economy was more desirable.³⁶

But it was not the only debating ground. In fact, some of the South's strongest evidence for the inevitability of labor coercion came not from the critique of free labor in the North, but from simple attention to the rising tide of unfree labor systems across the globe. African slavery, of course, flourished as never before in both mid-nineteenth-century Brazil and Cuba, despite the formal opposition of Great Britain and other European powers.³⁷ Systems of bondage in Russia, the Middle East, and along the Indian Ocean persisted, and in some cases, abetted by western imperialism and trade, thrived as never before.³⁸ For southerners, however, perhaps the most striking feature of the mid-century global labor economy was the introduction of Asian workers from India and China into the agricultural economies of the Western hemisphere. These so-called "coolie" laborers, along with purportedly free "apprentices" from West Africa, arrived in the Caribbean basin *en masse* during the 1850s—mostly in the emancipated sugar colonies of Britain and France, but also in enslaved

Spanish Cuba and Dutch Surinam. Were these new systems of contracted migrant labor a threat to the moral and economic future of black slavery? Some American slaveholders certainly thought so, and insofar as they have probed the antebellum South's response to the influx of Asian workers into the Caribbean, historians have largely emphasized these doubts and anxieties.³⁹

And yet while southerners frequently denounced the specific abuses of coolie labor, and occasionally worried about its threat to slavery's dominance in the production of tropical staples, they also argued that these new systems reflected a deeper ideological victory. In every corner of the planet, from East Asia to West Africa to South America, colonial powers had recognized the failure of emancipated labor. The spread of these new and undoubtedly coercive work regimes provided a physical proof of Europe's retreat from the free labor principle. To southerners, they offered a tangible, if unseemly, counterpart to European acceptance of the necessity of coercion—confirmation that the anti-abolitionist rhetoric of the *London Times* actually counted for something real. For if coolie labor systems were themselves an ugly hybrid between traditional servitude and the bankrupt assumptions of free labor economics, they also represented a possible way-station on the road back to global slavery. In this sense, their growth in the 1850s was celebration, not concern.

Few southern observers could doubt that the new coolie regimes were anything other than slave labor by another name. Hammond compared the British and French-sponsored labor migrations to "Algerine slavery," and in this view he had much company among the South's political leadership. Senators James Murray Mason of Virginia and Thomas Clingman of North Carolina, among many others, vocally agreed that Asian coolies and apprenticed Africans had been brought to the Americas "to be used there really and truly as slaves."⁴⁰

But while proslavery commentators often expressed real or feigned outrage at the exploitation of emigrant workers, the more thoughtful among them also recognized the larger implications of this novel attempt to wrangle profit out of "free" labor in the tropics. In the pages of *DeBow's Review*, W.W. Wright penned a long essay that examined various tropical labor systems from Mauritius to Peru, noting that they each required "a frightful annual consumption of human life." Yet the larger economic logic that upheld these regimes was as inescapable as it was murderous: "If civilization, like an ogre, asked for its daily breakfast the heads of one thousand African negroes," Wright observed, the world would provide them. Instead, it only "demands a little sugar and coffee"—and cotton and tobacco and rice—regardless of the human cost. Wright argued that Southern slavery was the most humane way to produce these goods, but above all he was sure that the worldwide demand for tropical staples required unfree and nonwhite labor in one form or another. "Two things are certain: and one is, that these fruits can never be produced by the labor of the pure-white races; and the other, that, be the cost what it may in human exertion, human suffering, or human life, Christendom demands and will have the produce of the tropics; and what Christendom demands, there are always heads, hearts, and hands, to execute."⁴¹

If Europe had finally recognized the necessity of compelling tropical labor from dark-skinned workers, what might that mean for the global future of slavery itself? Many southerners were hopeful. The *Savannah Republican*, while denouncing the African apprentice system as "traffic in human flesh and blood," added that it fortified

the South's own institutions: Great Britain "cannot do without Southern slavery. . . . She knows it, and does not desire its abolishment . . ." In Paris, US minister John Y. Mason, a Virginian, predicted that Europe's turn to coolie labor would diminish "fanatical denunciations of American slavery"; Britain and France now sought to "repair the error" of emancipation, not multiply its evils.⁴² George Fitzhugh, once again, gave the most thorough and most optimistic diagnosis of the coolie labor phenomenon. "England," he continued to emphasize, "sees, admits, and deplores the error of West India emancipation. This admission is but a step in a chain of argument, which must ultimately carry her further from abolition, and bring her nearer to slavery. For a while, she will try to maintain some middle ground between emancipation and slavery, and substitute coolies, and African apprentices, for negro slaves. But there are two reasons why she cannot long occupy this ground. First, its falsity and hypocrisy are too obvious; and secondly, coolies and apprentices do not answer the purpose of slaves. Her necessities will compel her to reinstate African slavery in its old and mildest form."⁴³

Not every proslavery propagandist could match Fitzhugh's cool certainty about the coming renewal of British slavery.⁴⁴ Still, by the mid-1850s, the lessons of Caribbean emancipation and the international coolie experiment seemed clear enough to proslavery thinkers. Europe had given up on the idea of "voluntary agricultural labor in tropical climates," as the *Southern Cultivator* put it. Even India, where Britain was making strenuous efforts to develop a rival to American cotton, no longer loomed as such a menacing competitor: the turning of the global tide empowered



Figure 18.1 This print, mostly likely from the first half of the nineteenth century, conveys the rise of pseudo-scientific racism and the claim that there exists a natural racial hierarchy justifying white supremacy. Views such as these were part of the broad argument Southern slaveholders made for the necessity of slavery and the absurdity of freedom for men and women of color. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-14079.

new confidence that an undertaking based on a “middle ground” labor organization was doomed to fail. The “real difficulty” the British faced in India did not stem from soils or seeds but “the worthlessness of the laborers”—not only their physical inferiority to African field hands, but the flaws inherent in a system where the Indian workers, whatever degree of freedom they actually possessed, were not subject to the “watchful guardianship of owners.” Only slavery itself, on the American model, could guarantee the direct supervision and personal domination that ensured superiority in the production of tropical staples. This, the *Cultivator* maintained, was a law of labor that “antislavery men can no more overcome than they can change the tropics, and make the world over again.”⁴⁵

* * *

“Of course slave societies, including that of the South, were doomed,” sighed Eric Hobsbawm as he settled in to consider the subject, which occupied no more than ten pages of his magisterial *Age of Capital*. By the 1850s, slavery as a factor in world history was “patently on the decline,” its economic muscle amputated by the spread of free labor, its social logic repudiated by bourgeois values. Hobsbawm, Barrington Moore, and other theorists of global modernity argued that the political conservatism of southern slaveholders reflected a painful awareness that the mad rush of the nineteenth century—industrial capitalism, liberal democracy, and the modern nation-state—threatened to swallow them in its wake. In this view of slaveholding conservatism—still shared, largely, by today’s world historians—the global theorists only echo the substantive research of the American scholars who have served as the chief analysts and explicators of proslavery thought.⁴⁶

And yet it is plain that many proslavery thinkers themselves rejected this formula. The great theme of *The Age of Capital* might have been the “subjection” of global agriculture to “the industrial world economy,” but this process, if impossible to mistake by 1875, had not definitively emerged by 1860.⁴⁷ The triumph of free trade preceded the triumph of heavy industry, and this chronology allowed southern elites, in the 1850s, to embrace a view of global economic power relations diametrically opposed to that of future historians. King Cotton, not King Coal, still commanded the oceans of commerce; the decline of global tariff protection and the rise of global prices equally testified to his might. And it was not just cotton, either—sugar, coffee, and other goods shared in the surging international market for agricultural staples.

What sustained all of these products, and indeed the edifice of the global economy itself, were the twin principles of racial hierarchy and coerced labor. By 1850, the champions of unfree labor had no doubt that the folly of black emancipation in the Caribbean and elsewhere had been conclusively established. The rise of indentured labor systems which shared the essential features of slavery—dark-skinned workers; white managers; bound labor; tropical produce—only appeared to confirm their belief that the global economy would vindicate southern institutions. Even the latest discoveries of transatlantic science—in biology, in agronomy, in management theory—and the latest advances of European empires—from Algeria to Australia,—appeared to align in harmony with the root ideas that undergirded slavery.⁴⁸ Unlike Eric Hobsbawm, who found it “difficult to envisage the survival of the South as a slave

society into the twentieth century,” southerners themselves were more than up to the challenge. DeBow estimated a total of 13 million slaves in 1900; Alabama congressman Henry W. Hilliard put the figure at 31 million by 1920.⁴⁹

Could southern elites, locked in the agony of sectional crisis, really have believed these grandiose visions of the future? Or was the confidence of proslavery internationalists just one ingredient in the “strange mixture of fury, gloom, and forced gaiety” that Louis Hartz thought characterized southern thought—a strained imitation of bourgeois self-assurance, overcompensating, as usual, for the South’s painful political isolation? Hartz scoffed at the extravagant imagination of George Fitzhugh, who, confronted with the triumph of free labor capitalism, “pretended to believe in just the reverse idea, that the South was leading a world-wide revival of the principles of feudalism.”⁵⁰ Yet Fitzhugh had the gift of expressing extravagantly what many southerners around him believed reflexively. A return to feudalism was surely not in the cards, but would it have been so difficult, in 1859, to foresee an emerging world order structured by racial hierarchy, enriched by free trade in staples, and fundamentally dependent on coerced labor? If some southerners seemed over-excited about the global future, there was nevertheless real reason for their excitement.⁵¹

The peppery bravado of southern internationalism, of course, did not flavor every defense of bondage in the 1850s. There were nearly as many varieties of proslavery argument as there were proslavery arguers, and each followed its own recipe—sometimes buoyant and international, and at other times dour and domestic. Religious piety, racial prejudice, economic boosterism, anxious masculinity, paternalistic grandeur, and tragic pessimism all jostled for room on the proslavery plate.⁵² Yet the rhetoric of international confidence was, perhaps, strongest among the South’s most influential thinkers and statesmen. Proslavery thinkers deserve consideration within the larger history of ideas, but exclusive focus on intellectuals like Hammond and DeBow can exaggerate their isolation from the rest of slaveholding society, effacing both their personal power and their deeper ideological communion with less original thinkers at the helm of southern politics. After all, in the 1850s Hammond was a United States Senator, and DeBow was editor of the South’s most widely circulated magazine.⁵³ As politicians and orators, the leading lights of the future Confederate States—Jefferson Davis, Alexander Stephens, Robert M.T. Hunter and many others—spent much of the 1850s promoting a vision of the world, and a vision of slavery, that drew confidently from the same global sources that inspired George Fitzhugh. To understand the southern political landscape at mid-century, we must reckon seriously with the bold imagination of proslavery internationalism.⁵⁴

In the end, of course, the problem for slaveholding elites was not international affairs, but domestic politics. The global triumph of free trade, however intoxicating, did nothing to alter the balance of power in the US Congress; the global failure of emancipation, however conclusive, counted for little in the presidential campaign against Abraham Lincoln. The end of the 1850s coincided with the end of the internationalist honeymoon. In some ways, as several historians have recently argued, the soaring economic and ideological optimism of the proslavery globalists encouraged their leadership to withdraw from the Union and forge ahead alone on a global stage. In other ways, though, proslavery’s international exuberance had served to hold back secessionist impulses throughout the previous decade: if global development

was actually working slowly to make the world safe for slavery, why should slaveholders risk it all in a desperate bid for political independence?⁵⁵ Once undertaken, however, the secessionist experiment shared a vital characteristic with the proslavery internationalism of the late antebellum years. As Americans in the 1850s, and as Confederates in the 1860s, the masters of the slave South aimed not to escape the modern world, but rather to command it.

NOTES

- 1 See, in particular, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Genovese, *The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820–1860* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1992); Drew Gilpin Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840–1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977); Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life in the Old South, 1810–1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); O'Brien, *Rethinking the South: Essays in Intellectual History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); Adam L. Tate, *Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals, 1789–1861: Liberty, Tradition, and the Good Society* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2005); Manisha Sinha, *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 63–93.
- 2 It is striking in this regard that Michael O'Brien, the major intellectual historian with the most capacious vision of the South's relationship with modernity, is also the intellectual historian with the least interest in proslavery politics. See Robert F. Bonner, "Ordering Southern Thought," *Reviews in American History*, 33, 1 (March 2005), 54–63.
- 3 Ford, "The Conservative Mind of the Old South," *Reviews in American History*, 21, 4 (December 1993), 592. On the "deep-seated emotional problems" confronted by many of the most important proslavery thinkers, including James Henry Hammond, Nathaniel Beverly Tucker, Edmund Ruffin, and Henry Hughes, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Hearts of Darkness: Wellsprings of a Southern Literary Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 36.
- 4 See, among recent work, Walter Johnson, "The Pedestal and the Veil: Rethinking the Capitalism/Slavery Question," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 24, 2 (Summer 2004), 299–308; Sven Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War," *American Historical Review*, 109, 5 (December 2004), 1405–38; Brian Schoen, *The Fragile Fabric of Union: Cotton, Federal Politics and the Global Origins of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); L. Diane Barnes, Brian Schoen, and Frank Towers, eds., *The Old South's Modern Worlds: Slavery, Region, and Nation in the Age of Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 5 For sensitive scholarship that depicts an ideological tug of war between the South's progressive impulses and the reactionary claims of slavery, see O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 938–994; William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, Volume II: Secessionists Triumphant 1854–1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. 25–58; Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 184–99; Kenneth Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of Antebellum Slavery* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 85–106; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "Modernizing Southern Slavery: The Proslavery Argument Reinterpreted," in J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, eds., *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of*

- C. Van Woodward (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 27–49; Drew Faust, “A Southern Stewardship: The Intellectual and the Proslavery Argument,” *American Quarterly*, 31, 1 (Spring 1979), 63–80. Not all historians, however, have had qualms about identifying slavery and proslavery thought as unequivocally modern: see James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Random House, 1983), 127–50, 193–22; Mark Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); John Majewski, *Modernizing a Slave Economy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
- 6 Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen*, 88–89. For perhaps the most direct argument that “the social relations of the private sphere profoundly shaped political ideas and actions in the public sphere,” see Stephanie McCurry, “The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina,” *Journal of American History*, 78, 4 (March 1992), 1245–64 (quoted 1258); *idem*, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); but also see J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Michael P. Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic: The Secession of Georgia* (Louisiana State University Press, 1977); Lacy K. Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); William A. Link, *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
- 7 The social and domestic orientations of this scholarship are especially vivid in treatments that stress the isolation of proslavery thinkers even within the antebellum slaveholding elite. See Faust, “A Southern Stewardship”; David Donald, “The Proslavery Argument Reconsidered,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 37, 1 (February 1971), 3–18.
- 8 When international and comparative historians considered the worldview of southern slaveholders, their analysis also largely took place within this framework. See David Potter, “The Civil War in the History of the Modern World: A Comparative View,” in *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1968), 287–300; Thomas Bender, *Nation Among Nations: America’s Place In World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 116–75; Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1990); Shearer Davis Bowman, *Masters and Lords: Mid-19th-Century US Planters and Prussian Junkers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- 9 For just a few major recent works that insist on a wider transnational approach to nineteenth-century slavery, see David Brion Davis, *Challenging the Boundaries of Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Edward B. Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); Robin Blackburn, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights* (London: Verso, 2011); Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).
- 10 Proslavery spokesmen would hardly have been surprised by the twenty-first century historiographical concept of a “second slavery” between 1830 and 1860, in which the bound-labor economies of the Western Hemisphere reaped the profit of spiking demand for staple goods in the industrial North Atlantic. See especially Dale W. Tomich, *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital, and World Economy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 56–71; Anthony E. Kaye, “The Second Slavery: Modernity in the Nineteenth-Century South and the Atlantic World,” *Journal of Southern History*, 75, 3 (August 2009), 627–50; Daniel B. Rood, “Plantation Technocrats: A Social History of Knowledge in the Slaveholding Atlantic World, 1830–1865,” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Irvine, 2010. An early notice of this symbiosis between industry and slavery in the mid-nineteenth

- century is in Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848* (New York: New American Library, 1962), 351.
- 11 L.W. Spratt, “The Destiny of the Slave States,” *Charleston Southern Standard* (June 25, 1853); reprinted in *DeBow’s Review* (September 1854), 280–84.
- 12 Paul Bairoch, “European Trade Policy 1815–1914,” in Peter Mathias and Sidney Pollard, eds., *Cambridge Economic History of Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), vol. 8, 1–160; David Todd, “John Bowring and the Global Dissemination of Free Trade,” *Historical Journal*, 51, 2 (2008), 373–97.
- 13 Anonymous [Thomas P. Kettell], “The Future of the South,” *DeBow’s Review* (February 1851), 137. For more on the ideology of “global-commercial pro-slavery,” see Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 280–301.
- 14 Calhoun to Robert M.T. Hunter, March 26, 1845; Calhoun to Abbott Lawrence, May 15, 1845, in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Clyde N. Wilson (28 vols.; Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1959–2003), vol. 21, 447–50, 550. On the long-standing importance of free trade to Calhoun’s political worldview, see Bruno Gujer, “Free Trade and Slavery: Calhoun’s Defense of Southern Interests Against British Interference, 1811–1848,” Ph.D. diss., University of Zurich, 1971.
- 15 On the confidence that northern and southern Democrats alike placed in global free trade and the international commercial power of the United States, see Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire* (rev. ed.: Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 55–94.
- 16 Bayly speech, *Cong. Globe*, 29 Cong., 1 Sess., Appx. 404 (March 11, 1846); Polk message, *Cong. Globe*, 29 Cong., 1 Sess., Appx. 7 (December 7, 1846); see also “Free Trade in England,” [Milledgeville, Ga.] *Federal Union*, March 24, 1846. For more on some southerners’ belief that the collective reduction in tariffs “had marked an epochal moment in world history,” see Schoen, *Fragile Fabric of Union*, 190–91.
- 17 On the British debate over the sugar duties in the late 1840s, which pitted free traders against an unlikely coalition of abolitionists and West India planters, see Drescher, *Mighty Experiment*, 176–88; Robert Livingston Schuyler, “The Abolition of British Imperial Preference,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 33, 1 (March 1918), 77–92; C. Duncan Rice, “‘Humanity Sold for Sugar!’ The British Abolitionist Response to Free Trade in Slave-Grown Sugar,” *The Historical Journal*, 13, 3 (September 1970), 402–18; Richard Huzzey, “Free Trade, Free Labour and Slave Sugar in Victorian Britain,” *Historical Journal*, 53 (2010), 359–79.
- 18 D.J.M. [David James McCord], “The Anatomy of the Navigation Acts,” *Southern Quarterly Review* (January 1850), 417. On the British debate regarding the Navigation Acts, see J.H. Clapham, “The Last Years of the Navigation Acts,” *English Historical Review*, 25, 99 (July 1910), 480–501; and the same article continued, *English Historical Review*, 25, 100 (October 1910), 687–707.
- 19 On the broader spread of free trade in continental Europe after the repeal of the repeal of the British Corn Laws, see Bairoch, “European Trade Policy,” 23–36; C.P. Kindleberger, “The Rise of Free Trade in Western Europe, 1820–1875,” *Journal of Economic History*, 35, 1, The Tasks of Economic History (March 1975), 20–55.
- 20 Report of the Secretary of the Treasury, *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., Appx. 2 (December 6, 1853). Guthrie’s report was quoted approvingly in *DeBow’s Review* (February 1854), 176.
- 21 Calhoun to William R. King, August 12, 1844, *Papers of Calhoun*, vol. 19, 573; Thomas Clemson to John C. Calhoun, November 28, 1845, *Papers of Calhoun*, vol. 21, 304–06. See also Rugemer, *Problem of Emancipation*, 219, 268.
- 22 [D.D. Deming], *The Power of Cotton; A Paper Read in the City of New-York* (New York: Chatterton and Brother, 1856); excerpted in “The Power of Cotton,” *DeBow’s Review* (May 1857), 540–43; “To What Free Labor Leads,” *Southern Cultivator* (July 1857),

- 224–225; “To What Free Labor Leads,” *Southern Planter* (August 1857), 457. Emphasis in original.
- 23 For careful distinctions between the economic views of different groups of southern planters, see Brian Schoen, “The Burdens and Opportunities of Independence: The Political Economies of the Planter Class,” in Barnes et al., eds., *The Old South’s Modern Worlds*, 66–84. In general cotton and sugar planters, by far the Deep South’s most politically and ideologically influential groups, were the most optimistic about the global market for slave goods.
- 24 See Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848* (London: Verso, 1988), 331–380, 473–516.
- 25 Fitzhugh, “The Counter Current, or Slavery Principle,” *DeBow’s Review* (July 1856), 90–95. For triumphant proslavery reactions to the fall of the sugar duties, see Charleston *Evening News* article reprinted in the Milledgeville [GA] *Federal Union*, September 8, 1846; [Macon] *Georgia Telegraph*, February 9, 1847; Andrew Jackson Donelson to Calhoun, March 3, 1848, *Papers of Calhoun*, vol. 25, 222; ‘J.A.C.’ [John A. Campbell], “The British West Indies Islands,” *Southern Quarterly Review* (January 1850), 342–77. On the transformation of West Indian economies after emancipation, and Britain’s increasingly negative view of black free labor, see Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, 158–230.
- 26 See Anonymous, “English Opinions, Cotton, Slave Trade, Etc,” *DeBow’s Review* (September 1857), 282–84; George Fitzhugh, “Southern Thought,” *DeBow’s Review* (October 1857), 337 (quotation); P.A. Morse, “Southern Slavery and the Cotton Trade,” *DeBow’s Review* (November 1857), 480–82; George Fitzhugh, “Wealth of the North and the South,” *DeBow’s Review* (December 1857), 595. For a sample of Carlyle citations in the southern press, see [Tallahassee, FL] *Floridian & Journal*, January 26, 1850; [Montgomery] *Daily Alabama Journal*, February 25, 1850; Anonymous, “A Few Thoughts on Slavery,” [Richmond, VA] *Southern Literary Messenger* (April 1854), 193–206.
- 27 Ephraim Mikell Seabrook, “Emancipation in the British West India Islands,” *Southern Quarterly Review* (April 1853), 422–454. On the role of the British West Indies in 1850s American debates over slavery and emancipation, see Rugemer, *Problem of Emancipation*, 258–290.
- 28 *Charleston Mercury*, January 12, 1849; Thomas R.R. Cobb, *An Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery in the United States of America, to Which is Prefixed, an Historical Sketch of Slavery* (Philadelphia: T. & J.W. Johnson & Co, 1858), 200; see also A.R. Kilpatrick, “The African El Dorado,” *DeBow’s Review* (May 1859), 503–13.
- 29 Thomas Prentice Kettell, “The Future of the South,” *DeBow’s Review* (February 1851), 137.
- 30 For a recent work that emphasizes the persistence of British antislavery in the 1840s and 1850s, see Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).
- 31 Anonymous, “The London Times on Cotton,” *Southern Cultivator* (May 1857), 145. See also Matthew Mason, “A World Safe For Modernity: Antebellum Southern Proslavery Intellectuals Confront Great Britain,” in Barnes et al., eds., *The Old South’s Modern Worlds*, 47–65.
- 32 Hammond, speech at Barnwell Court House, in *Selections from the Letters and Speeches of the Hon. James H. Hammond, of South Carolina*, ed. Clyde N. Wilson (Spartanburg, SC: Reprint Company, 1978 [1866]), 335–349; Simms, “Literary Woolgatherings,” *Southern Quarterly Review* (January 1854), 204.
- 33 A number of eminent US historians, including Louis Hartz, C. Vann Woodward, and Eugene Genovese, have been drawn to Fitzhugh’s thought primarily for his critique of liberal capitalism. See Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1955), 145–77; Woodward, “George Fitzhugh, *Sui Generis*,” in George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All! Or Slaves*

- Without Masters* (Richmond: A. Morris, 1857; reprint, Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1960), vii–xxxix; Genovese, *The World The Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York: Pantheon, 1969), 118–244. For an insightful discussion of Fitzhugh as a “bourgeois thinker” who saw slavery as part of a productive, progressive world order, see O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 972–92. For an interesting, if occasionally over-argued, work that places Fitzhugh, Hammond, and Thomas R. Dew within a tradition of “proslavery liberalism,” see David F. Ericson, *The Debate Over Slavery: Antislavery and Proslavery Liberalism in Antebellum America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 3–35, 93–153.
- 34 Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, 298–99. For more on 1850s southern confidence in slavery’s indestructible efficiency, see Robert Bonner, *Mastering America, Mastering America: Southern Slaveholders and the Crisis of American Nationhood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 106–13.
 - 35 Hammond, speech in Senate, March 4, 1858, in *Letters and Speeches*, 319; William Harper, “Slavery in Light of Social Ethics,” in *Cotton is King, and Proslavery Arguments . . .*, ed. E.N. Elliott (Augusta, GA: Pritchard, Abbott & Loomis, 1860), 590; see also O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 948–52; Sinha, *Counterrevolution of Slavery*, 87–93.
 - 36 On the southern critique of northern “free labor,” see Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made*, 165–94; Cunliffe, *Chattel Slavery and Wage Slavery: The Anglo-American Context* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1979). For a historical treatment of the coercive elements within the wage labor system, see Robert J. Steinfield, *Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
 - 37 For just a few of the most prominent proslavery celebrations of Brazilian and Cuban prosperity, see William Harper, “Memoir on Slavery,” *The Southern Literary Journal and Magazine of the Arts*, 3, 1 (January 1838), 241; John C. Calhoun, speech in Senate, January 4, 1848, *PJCC*, vol. 25, 64; Jefferson Davis, Speech in Senate, February 14, 1850, *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist*, vol. 1, 289–90; C.G. Memminger, “Lecture Delivered Before the Young Men’s Association of Augusta, April 10th, 1851,” reprinted in the [Milledgeville, GA] *Federal Union*, July 1, 1851.
 - 38 For recent investigations that highlight the persistence of slavery and the slave trade in the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean, see Alison Frank, “The Children of the Desert and the Laws of the Sea: Austria, Great Britain, the Ottoman Empire, and the Mediterranean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century,” *American Historical Review* 117, 2 (April 2012), 410–44; Richard B. Allen, “Satisfying the ‘Want for Labouring People’: European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850,” *Journal of World History* 21, 1 (2010): 45–73.
 - 39 On the rise of coolie labor in the mid-century Caribbean, see Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labor Overseas, 1830–1920* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974); Evelyn Hu-Dehart, “Chinese Coolie Labour in Cuba in the Nineteenth Century: Free Labour or Neoslavery?” *Slavery and Abolition*, 14, 1 (April 1993), 67–83; Stanley L. Engerman, “Contract Labor, Sugar, and Technology in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Economic History*, 43, 3 (September 1983), 635–59.
 - 40 Hammond, speech at Barnwell Court House, in *Letters and Speeches*, 346–48; “The Coolie Trade,” *DeBow’s Review* (July 1857), 32; Thomas Lanier Clingman, *Selections from the Speeches and Writings of Hon. Thomas L. Clingman, of North Carolina, with Additions and Explanatory Notes* (Raleigh: John Nichols, 1877), 400–403; James Murray Mason (quoted), *Cong. Globe*, 36th Cong., 1 Sess., 3098–99 (June 18, 1860).
 - 41 W.W. Wright, “The Coolie Trade; or, the Excomienda System of the Nineteenth Century,” *DeBow’s Review* (September 1859), 296–321.
 - 42 *Savannah Republican*, quoted in *Richmond Enquirer*, June 8, 1853; John Y. Mason to Lewis Cass, February 19, 1858, in *Senate Exec. Docs*, 35 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 49; *Presidential*

- message communicating reports of Secretary of State and Secretary of Navy, with accompanying papers, on African slave trade (Series 929, Washington, 1858), 55–57.
- 43 Fitzhugh, “Southern Thought,” *DeBow’s Review* (October 1857), 346. For more southern commentary on coolie labor as a reflection of slavery’s ideological triumph, see Cobb, *An Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery*, 196–200; Louisa McCord, “Negro-Mania,” *DeBow’s Review* (May 1852), 520–21; Anonymous, “A Few Thoughts on Slavery,” *Southern Literary Messenger* (April 1854), 193–206; *Charleston Mercury*, October 4, 1854.
- 44 When Fitzhugh proclaimed that abolitionism, “as in the case of the crusades,” will soon be considered “a mad infatuation,” even DeBow, in his editorial role, appended a footnote expressing some doubt about “the confidence of our friend.” *DeBow’s Review* (October 1857), 347.
- 45 Daniel Lee, “Cotton and Uncle Tom,” *Southern Cultivator* (June 1853), 161. Southerners had long been ambivalent about the economic threat presented by Indian cotton and alert to the hypocrisy of imperial Britain’s antislavery crusade. For an overview, see Elizabeth Kelly Gray, “Whisper to him the word ‘India’: Trans-Atlantic Critics and American Slavery, 1830–1860,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 28, 3 (Fall 2008), 379–406. The *Southern Cultivator’s* confidence, however, reflected a reinforced belief in southern slavery as first among global equals in the increasingly competitive field of coercive staple agriculture. For more examples in the 1850s, see “Lord Palmerston on Cotton,” *Georgia Telegraph* (via the *Washington Union*), December 16, 1856; William Elliott, “Southern Cotton—Competition of Algeria,” *DeBow’s Review* (March 1858), 193–201; Anonymous, “Practical Effects of Emancipation,” *DeBow’s Review* (April 1855), 488.
- 46 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848–1875* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1975), 141–43, 182–86; Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 111–56; Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World: 1798–1914* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 161–65, 402–10; Bender, *Nation Among Nations*, 116–175.
- 47 Hobsbawm, *Age of Capital*, 174.
- 48 For a scholarship on southern efforts to claim different branches modern scientific research on behalf of slavery, see Lester D. Stephens, *Science, Race, & Religion in the American South: John Bachman and the Charleston Circle of Naturalists, 1815–1895* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); David F. Allmendinger, Jr., *Ruffin: Family and Reform in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Steven G. Collins, “System, Organization, and Agricultural Reform in the Antebellum South, 1840–1860,” *Agricultural History*, 75, 1 (Winter, 2001), 1–27; R. Keith Aufhauser, “Slavery and Scientific Management,” *Journal of Economic History*, 33, 4 (Dec., 1973), 811–24; David Roediger and Elizabeth Esch, *The Production of Difference: Race and the Management of Labor in US History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Rood, “Plantation Technocrats.” For southerners who drew parallels between their slave society and European imperialism,—especially “white settler” imperialism, see Wright, “The Coolie Trade,” *DeBow’s Review* (September 1859), 296–98, 315–21; Louisa McCord, “Diversity of the Races; Its Bearing Upon Negro Slavery,” 1851, in Richard C. Lounsbury, ed., *Louisa S. McCord: Political and Social Essays* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 177–83; John Randolph Tucker, Address at Phoenix and Philomathean Societies of William and Mary College, July 3, 1854, reprinted in the *Richmond Enquirer*, November 13, 1854; Robert May, *Manifest Destiny’s Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 60–64.
- 49 Hobsbawm, *Age of Capital*, 141; J.D.B. DeBow, ed., *The Industrial Resources, etc., of the Southern and Western States . . .*, vol. II (New Orleans: Pudney & Russell, 1853), 313;

- Henry W. Hilliard, "Agricultural Science and Literature," address given to Alabama State Agricultural Society, Nov. 17, 1859, in *American Cotton Planter* (February 1860), 57–64. An earlier DeBow prediction envisioned 10.6 million slaves in 1910: "The Origin, Progress, and Prospects of Slavery," *DeBow's Review* (July 1850), 13–14.
- 50 Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, 157.
- 51 From the perspective of the late twentieth century, both Immanuel Wallerstein and Paul Gilroy have, in different ways, emphasized slavery's compatibility with global modernity: Immanuel Wallerstein, "American Slavery and the Capitalist World-Economy," in *The Capitalist World-Economy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 202–21; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 55–56; see also Kaye, "The Second Slavery," 628–30; Schoen, "The Burdens and Opportunities of Independence," 66–69.
- 52 For some different flavors of proslavery thought and politics, in addition to the works cited above, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Mark M. Smith, *Debating Slavery: Economy and Society in the Antebellum American South* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998); John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2002); William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993 [1961]); Christopher Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi: Masculinity, Honor, and the Antiparty Tradition, 1830–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). For shrewd comments on the heterogeneity and flexibility of proslavery discourse, see Schoen, *Fragile Fabric of Union*, 161.
- 53 On the circulation of *DeBow's Review*, see Robert F. Durden, "J.D.B. De Bow: Convolutions of a Slavery Expansionist," *Journal of Southern History*, 17, 4 (November 1951), 441–61. Too-rigid distinctions between "alienated" proslavery intellectuals and "mainstream" slaveholding leaders inform scholarship on all sides of the debate about southern conservatism: see Oakes, *The Ruling Race*, 193–96 (quoted); Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom*, 4–5; Faust, "A Southern Stewardship."
- 54 On Davis and Hunter as confident proslavery internationalists, see Matthew Karp, "Arsenal of Empire: Southern Slaveholders and the US Military in the 1850s," *Common-place*, 12, 4 (July 2012). In a preview of his notorious 1861 "Cornerstone Address," Stephens in 1859 compared the progress of global opinion about slavery with "the Copernican system in astronomy": slowly but surely, he argued, the "world is growing wiser," and would soon accept that "subordination is the normal condition of the negro." Speech delivered at Augusta, Georgia, February 7, 1859, in *Alexander Stephens, in Public and Private, with Letters and Speeches, Before, During, and Since the War*, ed. Henry Cleveland (Philadelphia: National Publishing Co., 1866), 647–50.
- 55 On the relationship between cotton, slavery, and secession, see Schoen, *Fragile Fabric of Union*, 237–59; Mason, "A World Safe for Modernity," 56–59; Nicholas Onuf and Peter Onuf, *Nations, Markets, and War: Modern History and the American Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 308–42. For an interpretation of proslavery internationalists' fidelity to American power in the 1850s, see Karp, "Arsenal of Empire."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE REPUBLIC IN PERIL

Expansion, the Politics of Slavery, and the Crisis of the 1850s



Michael A. Morrison

The American Civil War remains one the two defining events in the nation's early history (the Revolution being the other), and it was, as Shelby Foote had it, "the crossroads of our being." Yet although the body of knowledge about the impending crisis has increased greatly, historians have not been able to agree on a precise route that the nation took to that historic crossroad. In his second inaugural address in March 1865, Abraham Lincoln looked back at the beginning of the Civil War four years earlier. "All knew," he said, that slavery "was somehow, the cause of the war." Few historians would doubt the basic truth of his statement, and no plausible interpretation of the conflict can ignore slavery. In a nation that detested dependency and repudiated inequality, slavery constituted an organizational metaphor that infused the sectional debate from the introduction of the Wilmot Proviso in 1846 to the secession of the South in the winter of 1860-1. As one Massachusetts Democrat put it, "Freedom is the condition of a living and self-sustaining principle, and slavery is a relative term, which indicates the degrees of its practical enjoyments. As one is advanced, the other is lessened."¹ As he perhaps understood, the meaning of slavery in the debates that structured and informed the sectional conflict of the 1850s must be read at a number of levels.

The standard and long-standing focus on the extension of slavery into the West and future acquisitions concentrates too narrowly on the institution itself. It underestimates the racism of antislavery activists and does not fully encompass the concept of slavery for antebellum white Americans. Slavery was a graphic reminder to southerners of the reality of degradation, impoverishment, and despotism. It was also a mechanism, they contended, for encouraging independence and social mobility and provided a barrier against exploitation. In the North, slavery was, simply put, the negation of equality and democracy. Northerners and southerners came to view the sectional crisis of the 1850s through the same prism: the American Revolution. The meaning of that experience, understood in terms of independence, freedom, and self-government defined what was American. The Revolution also constituted a common past and provided a common identity for a diverse, highly mobile population. From the introduction of the Wilmot Proviso in 1846, which would have banned slavery in

any territory acquired as a result of the war with Mexico, to the secession crisis, the nation was forced to address the Americanness of slavery.

Between 1845 and 1848, a surge of territorial expansion took the nation to the Pacific Coast and made it a true continental empire. With the annexation of the Texas republic to the Union in 1845 and the Mexican Cession of 1848, the United States acquired more than one million square miles of land. “The prevailing epidemic in the country is to ‘go West,’” a Pittsburgh editor told his readers in 1857. “Hardly a man can be found but desires to ‘go West’ either to speculate in lands for a time, or to settle there permanently.” Instructed by a political culture whose purpose was to realize and extend the basic republican tenets of equality and liberty, enthusiasts of Manifest Destiny understood the political power of territorial aggrandizement. Indeed, territorial expansion and the quest for an empire of liberty coexisted with the founding of the nation itself. James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and others became convinced that only a powerful central authority could ensure union and, more important, promote the physical and economic growth necessary to an empire of liberty. In fact, in defense of the Constitution, Madison declared in *Federalist* number 10 that an empire of liberty was the function of territorial expansion. “Extend the sphere,” Madison contended, “and . . . you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens.”² Expansionists of the 1840s had adopted and internalized this much from revolutionary republicanism.

Despite the ability of expansionists to quote chapter and verse from *Federalist* Number 10, they were oblivious to the fact that Madison understood that, even in a widespread republic, liberty and equality—freedom and democracy—were fundamentally antagonistic. Supporters of the extension of the nation’s boundaries to the Pacific Coast in the 1840s asserted that they were mutually reinforcing and interchangeable. Therein lay the power of territorial aggrandizement. John L. O’Sullivan, editor of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, looking as much to the design of the almighty as to the working of the nation’s history, wrote in 1845 that the destiny of the United States was “to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federative self government entrusted to us.”³

Yet, by the 1850s, debate over the extension of slavery into the newly acquired lands of the Mexican Cession and initiatives for potential acquisitions in the Caribbean made salient the inherent tension between liberty and equality, freedom and democracy. Americans felt their enthusiasm for further territorial possessions and empire cool after 1848, when expansion became associated with the spread of slavery or antislavery rather than freedom. Throughout the 1850s, the nation was forced to address the problematic relationship of slavery’s relevance to their empire of liberty. As a result, the only acquisition of territory between 1848 and 1860 was the modest Gadsden Purchase in the Southwest, a territory so desolate that Kit Carson had reported that a wolf could not have made a living on it. The political source of the sectional crisis of the 1850s and the Civil War was rooted in the meaning of national expansion and the impulse to maintain and expand the republican freedom that gave rise to it. A contemporary of John Tyler, taking note of the president’s belief that Texas annexation and territorial expansion generally would preserve slavery and

maintain the Union, claimed that the “disease” of empire lay “deep in the human heart.”⁴ That long-standing, deeply entrenched disease of the nation’s polity would eventually claim the lives of over 700,000 Americans North and South.

TEXAS ANNEXATION AND THE MEXICAN WAR: THE POLITICS OF EXPANSION

Historians have maintained that Texas annexation first raised the issue of the expansion of slavery. By 1841, when John Tyler succeeded to the presidency, investment in Texas bonds, speculation in its lands, and migration to the republic—a slaveholding republic—together made annexation an issue of national interest. Tyler, a president without a party and with only a diminished and diminishing “corporal’s guard” of supporters, took personal and political interest in the fate of Texas. Slavery was central to Tyler’s domestic and foreign policies. A man not given to irony, he believed that the diffusion of the institution west and south in Thomas Jefferson’s expanding empire of liberty would allay sectional tensions and preserve the Union. Moreover the threat of the British abolitionist movement—real to Secretary of State John C. Calhoun, imagined by Tyler, and exaggerated by Duff Green—motivated the president and other proslavery annexationists to insist that Texas annexation was warranted on the grounds of national security and the preservation of the Union. Neither Calhoun nor Tyler saw any contradiction in their logic.⁵ After protracted negotiations between the administration and the Texas Republic, Tyler finally had his treaty of annexation in April 1844. He sent it along to the Senate for ratification. After a series of high-voltage, politically charged debates on Texas and expansion more generally, it was defeated. Whigs stood solidly against the treaty, and they were joined by a handful of free soil Democrats.

Tyler, who is consistently ranked low among late antebellum presidents, understood that the divisions between Democrats and Whigs and within the electorate over the question of annexation were both principled and defined by the ideologies of both parties. Individual liberty, most Democrats believed, was incompatible with overcrowding, exhausted lands, and wage dependency. Believing that personal autonomy and true freedom depended on land ownership and economic independence, enthusiasts of annexation maintained that the addition of thousands of square miles of territory to the Union (Texans claimed—one would say they hardly proved—that the western boundary of their republic ran along the Rio Grande up to Santa Fe) addressed and made real the single most consequential prerequisite of republican freedom.

Whigs, who opposed Tyler’s treaty, feared that a Democratic empire based on unchecked territorial growth would undermine the evolution of American civilization. As the population grew increasingly nomadic, there would be distaste for peaceful, civilizing occupations. Their individual capacities and that of the nation would remain undeveloped. Some in the party—especially in New England and the Western Reserve—raised the danger of slavery extension in their opposition. The party’s hostility to annexation, however, remained rooted in the fear that it would promote the widespread bondage of whites by enslaving millions to the degraded conditions of a primitive, colonial society.⁶

Despite the Whigs’ best efforts, Texas annexation became an issue—the issue—in the presidential campaign of 1844. Democrats ran James K. Polk on a platform that

called for the “re-annexation” of Texas and the “re-occupation” of the Oregon Territory. Polk, riding this powerful issue of territorial expansion, defeated the Whig party nominee, Henry Clay. Believing that the election was a referendum on Texas annexation, Tyler urged Congress to take up the measure before it adjourned. By-passing the treaty ratification process (which requires a two-thirds majority in the Senate), Congress annexed Texas as a state by joint resolution, with simple and fairly slim majorities in both Houses. Tyler signed the bill on March 1, 1845.

Polk assumed the presidency determined to transform the United States into an ocean-bound republic and an international power. Yet his cabinet was neither fully aware of his goals nor prepared for his aggressiveness in realizing them. He had a well-deserved reputation among contemporaries for “sly cunning which he thought shrewdness, but which was really disingenuousness and duplicity.” Humorless, stiff-necked, and socially inept, Polk was unpopular. Foes scorned his “narrow partisanship, lack of candor, and [a] proclivity for secrecy and evasiveness.” In the Fall of 1845, he quietly but forcefully began to pressure Mexico to cede Upper California and New Mexico to the United States. In a private meeting with Thomas Hart Benton, Polk asserted that the American people would never permit Mexico’s western provinces to pass into the possession of Great Britain. He told Benton that he had “California & the fine bay of San Francisco as much in view as Oregon.” And in his first annual message in December, the president declared that “the people of this continent alone have the right to decide their own destiny.”⁷

Clay, bested by Polk in the election, had predicted that annexation would lead to war with Mexico. He was right. What Clay failed to see was the extent of Polk’s territorial horizons, which encompassed Upper California and New Mexico. Although Polk preferred to realize this imperial dream through negotiation or coercion and purchase, he did not shrink from the opportunity which an armed conflict with Mexico might provide. He provoked it, welcomed it, and made good use of it. The president ordered General Zachary Taylor’s forces to defend the extreme, dubious, and diplomatically indefensible claim of a Texas boundary that ran along the Rio Grande to El Paso. After a border skirmish along the river in April 1846 between United States and Mexican forces, Polk asked Congress in early May to declare that a state of war existed between the nations. So it did.

Polk finally made it clear to his cabinet that the price of peace would be the acquisition of Mexican territory. Although the extent of the territorial settlement remained undefined, the president insisted that although the United States “had not gone to war for conquest” the conflict would have to result in “indemnification for the past and security for the future.” To that end—vague as it was—he sent a message to Congress on August 8, 1846 expressing his desire to end the two-month-old war with Mexico on a basis of peace that was honorable to both parties. (Like Tyler, Polk was not given to irony.) The president requested an appropriation of \$2 million to pay for any territorial concessions that might be made by Mexico. That evening, the House took up the request.

After a handful of Whigs flayed the president for what they considered to be an unnecessary war (and then voted for the bill), the chair recognized David Wilmot—a short, portly, first-term Democrat from Pennsylvania. A loyal supporter of the administration, Wilmot praised the president for his readiness to negotiate an honorable peace. To ensure that goal, Wilmot offered an amendment to the appropriation

bill prohibiting slavery in any territory acquired from Mexico. Although his proviso passed in the House, it failed in the Senate. Wilmot's proviso and the southern response to it fashioned the "blades of shears" that would eventually sever the bonds of Union in 1860.⁸

Wilmot and his supporters denied that Congress had the power to legalize slavery, a creature of state and local laws, in any territory directly under federal jurisdiction. But the appeal of the proviso went deeper yet. More to the point, they concluded that the Union itself rested on the principle of individual freedom: to extend slavery would contravene that fundamental tenet. Additionally, they asserted that personal liberty lay at the heart of meaning of the American Revolution and, by extension, the Republic. The purpose of these free-soilers was "to carry forward and perfect the great work of individual, social, and civil elevation which our fathers nobly began." They alleged that the entire history of the nation was a tribute to, and an unqualified endorsement of, human freedom. In the Declaration of Independence, "for the first time in the history of the world, was the doctrine of the inalienable RIGHT of every man to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, solemnly proclaimed as THE BASIS OF A NATIONAL POLITICAL FAITH." Indeed, they avowed themselves in their first principles to be "the same party as that which in 1776, rallied around the Declaration of Independence. . . . The same party as that which in 1787, formed our own federal Constitution."⁹

Southerners agreed that Congress's power over slavery was limited: it could not restrict the spread of slavery. To do so would violate the due process clause of the Fifth Amendment. They replied hotly to the charge that they were un-American. If individual liberty constituted one of the animating objects of the American political system so, too, did the principle of equality: the equality of slaveholders under the Constitution, and of the slave states within the Union. Restriction, they contended, would reduce southern citizens—slaveholders and non-slaveholders alike—to a second-class, degraded status. It would be the means of their enslavement within the Union. And, as they viewed it, the history of the Revolution was one of a struggle by British colonists against the oppression of inferiority. Although the provocation then was "of trivial, practical oppression," colonial resistance was based on defense of principle. The trials and perils of the Revolutionary War inculcated in those patriots one truth above all others: "the least concession of inferiority in position or rights . . . would afford the opening, and be made the pretext and means of encroachments and inroads, until superiority, riches and domination would become the arrogated possession of the favored portion [read: the North], and degradation, impoverishment, and subjection, the bitter lot of the latter [the South]."¹⁰

Polk's war would dramatically expand the nation's boundaries. It also would make overt sectional fault lines, give a sectional and racial cast to expansion in the 1850s, and thus transform the Jacksonian two-party system. Although the main salvo in the Whigs assault on Polk was executive usurpation, the far more telling charge was that wars of conquest were incompatible with American political principles. The United States would rule distant provinces as conquered territories and compel other peoples to adopt our form of government. Worse yet, territorial aggrandizement would not only incorporate hostile peoples into the American polity, it would integrate inferior races into the warp and weft of American government and society. If not enslaved, one antiwar Whig claimed, these "mongrel races . . . of ignorance & barbarism"

would infest the halls of Congress, holding in their power the American birthright of republican government. The forms of the republic might be preserved, another critic maintained; “but as it was with Rome, the forms may survive after the spirit of republicanism shall have passed away.” In that case, another opponent of the war whimpered, the Union would be “an entity changed and hardly worth preserving.”¹¹

The language of redemption and uplift that infused the promise, if not the premise, of Manifest Destiny conflicted with the belief—the hopes—of expansionists that persons of color—blacks, Indians, and Mexicans—would be erased from the continent. “Actions purported to be benevolent and generous,” one historian has maintained, “often became chauvinistic and condescending and the ostensible beneficiaries frequently became victims.” Yet the racism that gave rise to and infused support for the war also and without contradiction limited the scope of territorial ambitions during the conflict. Although by 1847 some Democrats demanded that all or most of Mexico be annexed, opponents of the war and expansive acquisitions issuing from it declared, “We have far more to dread from the acquisitions of the debased population who have been so summarily manufactured into American citizens than to hope from the extension of our territorial limits.”¹²

The expansionist projects of the 1850s, none of which came to fruition, contained peoples that Americans refused to rule and to absorb. Americans had never viewed their ever-expanding empire as a home for native peoples. To be sure, neither had they sought to enslave Native Americans or Mexicans to servitude, though their attempts to subordinate the former were particularly barbarous. They lusted after the land and its resources. It is suggestive that the enormous tract of land the United States wrested from Mexico in 1848 contained only a few thousand inhabitants.

The war, but especially Wilmot’s proviso, also had a strange if decisive impact on the antislavery movement that would reshape political alignments in the North in the 1850s. On the one hand, it fragmented the movement, dividing radical Garrisonian abolitionists from more moderate Liberty party members and antislavery evangelicals. “The antislavery host is now divided into two classes . . . as widely different as the North is from the South,” an Illinois Liberty party editor contended. “The leading feature of the non-resistant or Garrisonian abolitionism, is *destruction*, and that of the new organized or liberty party is *regeneration*.”¹³

Yet at the same time, opposition to the war and to an imperial republic made political antislavery in the form of slavery restriction viable and a potentially broad-based platform that could unite various elements of antislavery and reform sentiment in the North.¹⁴ Thus the contradictory and ironic effect of popular reaction and opposition to the war was to moderate antislavery activism by marginalizing Garrisonians at the same time it foregrounded the issue in politics through opposition to the war and territorial expansion. Put in other terms, it limited the abolitionist appeal, while broadening political antislavery by bringing together moderate antislavery activists and more politically minded and politically oriented Whig, Liberty Party, and free soil Democrat restrictionists.¹⁵

Even more significantly, the broadening of third-party antislavery politics had the adventitious if unintended consequence of creating a rationale for the participation of free blacks and women in a political culture the Jacksonian political system could not and did not encompass. It did so by infusing a moral dimension into political questions as diverse as temperance, slavery, war, and Indian removal. Although these

issues assumed a political shape, a Liberty party editor asserted, “the *moral element* is always conspicuous in them, to such an extent, indeed, that primarily they must be considered as *moral questions*.”¹⁶ Thus, for example, a Ladies Antislavery Association actively campaigning for Owen Lovejoy scorned issues such as banking and the tariff, leaving them “to sordid men to discuss, whose every idea is connected with dollars and cents.” Such “metaphysical, abstract discussions” paled in importance to “the condition of three millions of our brethren and sisters.”¹⁷ And so they did.

Liberty Party supporters were not alone or unique in viewing slavery—or antislavery—as a moral and political question. Yet they attempted to expand the field and essence of politics. Surveying the progress of the abolition movement and the many grounds on which slavery was indicted and attacked, the *Western Citizen* declared that “people are feeling and in a thousand ways acting out their hostility to slavery. They realize its importance as a political and moral question.” It also noted that within the antislavery phalanx there was ample scope for the exercise of all the diversity of talent that were ever arrayed on a moral subject.” Antislavery politics that melded the moral and political became linked to other issues such as temperance, workers issues, Indian removal, and war. A labor reformer insisted that “the question of slavery and Labor Reform movements are the same.” He lashed out at abolitionists who had not a word to say for the workingman. “Many of them appear anxious to rivet their chains as the southern slaveholders are to bind their colored victims,” he spat. Arguing for sustained political action on an array of fronts, the *Religious Telegraph* urged its readers to use the elective franchise to “effectively put down, not slavery alone, but all vice. . . .”¹⁸

Michael Pierson has written with great insight about the Liberty Party’s problematic and conflicted attitude toward women’s political activism. But as he astutely and tartly points out, “On occasion, Liberty men acknowledged that women’s activism had a political purpose.” Liberty women employed national political developments to forge influential positions within local circles. Jane Swisshelm, who supported Liberty Party candidate James G. Birney in the 1844 campaign, makes the point precisely. The war with Mexico, she wrote, was “the work of beating poor little Mexico—a giant whipping a cripple.” Insisting that women had an equal interest with men in the success of the government and were just as able to understand public policy, she curtly, if somewhat rhetorically, asked: “Do you not think . . . it would have been but fair that we should have got leave to say whether we would have a war for Texas and Slavery? That is before you took our fathers, and brothers, our husbands and sons?” Similarly Liberty women in Dundee, Illinois, told the voters of the Fourth District that they would not address them “on common-place topics of the day.” Rather it was the “horrors of slavery” that was the issue to be raised, and whether the male voters in Dundee were worthy of that Revolutionary heritage. “Is it not incumbent upon you,” they asked, “to scrutinize and see that yourselves have not become more tyrannical than ever Great Britain was?”¹⁹

As the Liberty women of Dundee suggested, perhaps the greatest divide between Garrisonian abolitionists and more politically engaged Liberty men and antislavery evangelicals was over the inherited revolutionary political heritage. In a nation where loyalties were first to the community, then to the state, the Revolution provided a common heritage to a diverse citizenry. That experience shaped the outlook and was the language of Jacksonian America. The territorial question led to the sectionalization

of that inherited revolutionary political heritage, to be sure; but it also made clear, distinct, and permanent the gulf in the political culture of the abolitionist movement.

"We need to get back to the true Spirit of the revolution—to those great principles on which the nation declared itself free and independent," the *Oberlin Evangelist* insisted. "The hope of our country lies in resuscitating the great principles of law—the great doctrines of the Declaration of '76 and of the Constitution of '89." Gamaliel Bailey concurred. "The natural state of man is freedom," he wrote. "The common sense of mankind imbodyed [sic] in our Declaration of Independence asserts that right to liberty is inherent in human nature, inalienable, and belongs, not to one man or class, or one country, but to all men everywhere." Closing the circle, the editor of the *Western Citizen* maintained, "*It is a fact*, that the Liberty party is the only one that professes to labor for the abolition of slavery, and seeks to administer the government on the principles laid down by the Whigs of 1776."²⁰

Perhaps; Wendell Phillips begged to differ. "The abolitionist finds no readier foe, no greater obstacle than the Union," he asserted; "and the lover of the Constitution of 1789 knows that slavery and the Constitution will die together." The Massachusetts Antislavery Society predicted that supporters of Wilmot's proviso—whether Democrats, Whigs, or Liberty men—"will discover that the attempt to destroy or limit, slavery under the Constitution, is as vain and as absurd as to fight in fetters." The only way to be free from the slaveholders' despotism "is to dissolve the Union! It may look hard, but it is much easier than to carry the Wilmot Proviso." Peering into the future, Ralph Waldo Emerson predicted a Mexican cession "will be as the man [who] swallows arsenic, which brings him down in turn. Mexico will poison us."²¹ Although Emerson could not have known it then, the political coalition that drew on these divergent sources, and which would lead to the formation of the Republican Party in 1854, would pose a more significant threat to the slaveholding South than would abolitionism.

COMPROMISE OF 1850: THE POLITICS OF ILLUSION

The hypothetical conflict over slavery restriction became real with the Mexican cession in 1848. From the Spring to the Fall of 1847, American troops won a series of victories over an outclassed and outgunned Mexican army. In September, forces commanded by Winfield Scott entered the capital of Mexico City. By the winter of 1848 the United States effectively controlled New Mexico and Upper California. Negotiations with the Mexican government, however, faltered. Not until February 2, 1848, did Polk's peace emissary, Nicholas Trist, sign the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ending the Mexican-American War. By terms of the agreement, Mexico gave up all claims to Texas above the Rio Grande and ceded New Mexico and California. In return for the cession of 619,000 square miles of territory, the United States agreed to pay Mexico \$15 million and assume the claims of American citizens against that government up to \$3.25 million. The Senate ratified the treaty on March 10, 1848. Including Texas, the United States had acquired approximately half of Mexico.

In May, Polk sent a message to Congress insisting that territorial governments be established for Oregon, New Mexico, and California. Congress found itself deadlocked and compromise remained elusive. Some advocated to no avail the extension of the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific. Moderate Democrats such as presidential hopeful Lewis Cass then advanced the position of noninterference

or, as it became known, popular sovereignty. It had many distinct advantages. It was sufficiently ambiguous to ensure widespread appeal. Popular sovereignty also would remove the contentious territorial issue from the halls of Congress. Most important, limited government and noninterference in the local affairs of citizens resonated with the long-standing principles of the Democratic Party and the meaning of the American Revolution. The right of self-government, Indiana's Cyrus Dunham declared finally, was "that great principle which lies at the foundation of republican liberty—the principle declared by our revolutionary fathers, and sealed with their blood."²²

Non-interference became the platform on which the Democrats ran Cass as their presidential nominee in 1848. As they had in 1840, the Whigs passed over their party leader Henry Clay for a general, Zachary Taylor. A legal resident of Louisiana, Taylor owned more than 100 slaves. He had no known political views and had voted in no election. Portraying Taylor as a Washingtonesque figure—a man above the partisan fray and sectional animosities—the Whigs adopted no platform. The Free Soil Party, composed of antislavery Whigs, free-soil Democrats, and members of the Liberty Party, nominated Martin Van Buren, adopting the slogan "Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor, Free Men." The electorate, offered the choice between two concrete solutions to the territorial issue—non-interference or restriction—chose neither. Instead they elected a man whose ties to the Whig party were weak and whose political views remained obscure. He proclaimed himself "a Whig but not an ultra Whig" and promised that he would "administer the government untrammelled by party schemes."²³

As president Taylor urged Congress to admit California and New Mexico as states when each should apply for admission to the Union. Small chance of that. The House could not elect a Speaker. Ballot after ballot were cast to no avail. Members called each other liars, disunionists, and suggested offensive language be met with violence—pistols and Bowie knives being the weapons of choice. It was in this rancorous political environment that Henry Clay attempted to fashion a comprehensive settlement to the territorial issue. Clay's larger hope was that it would suppress the sectionalism that infused the question so that the nation could deal with what he believed were more important economic issues.

In January 1850, Clay, now seventy-two and in feeble health, proposed that Congress admit California as a free state; provide territorial governments for the rest of the Mexican Session without restrictions as to slavery; assume the Texas state debt in exchange for it forfeiting its territorial claims in New Mexico; enact a more forceful fugitive slave law; and abolish the slave trade, not slavery, in the District of Columbia. Congress debated Clay's initiatives (now bundled together in a single Omnibus bill) for the remainder of the winter into the summer. Northern free-soilers, southern rights advocates, and the president were all aligned in opposition. Opponents managed to dismantle the Omnibus by separating the territorial bills from the package, and by late summer Clay's compromise was defeated.

It was not dead. But Zachary Taylor was. After attending a dedication ceremony for the Washington Monument in the blazing heat on July 4, Taylor returned to the White House and consumed vast amounts of raw fruit and vegetables which he washed down with large quantities of iced milk. He immediately evinced symptoms of acute gastroenteritis. On July 9th he died. Millard Fillmore, who was more inclined to Clay's compromise, assumed the presidency. In the Senate, Stephen Douglas realized

that he could garner enough votes for Clay's proposals if he shepherded each through Congress one by one. Douglas recognized that there was no majority in Congress that favored a comprehensive settlement of the territorial issue. Through a series of parliamentary maneuvers, Douglas guided the separate bills through the House and Senate in August and September.

Hailed then and now as the great Compromise of 1850, it was then and remains now an illusion. At no time in 1850 was there a majority in Congress that favored a comprehensive sectional settlement. Extremists North and South constituted the majority in the House and Senate. The Compromise was less the result of good-faith bargaining and renewed sectional comity than of parliamentary maneuvering. Beneath the Compromise of 1850, the sectionalization of the Jacksonian political system continued unabated.

Congressional and public reactions to the European revolutions of 1848, and to the visit of the Hungarian patriot Louis Kossuth in 1852, speak to the declension and disorganization of political coherence in the years following the Mexican cession. Whereas Americans had looked forward to the fall of "every despotic and exclusive institution of the Old World," the revolutions of 1848 degenerated into class struggles and despotic repression. Although the Hungarian rebel was warmly received in the North and South, European revolutionary movements had lost much of their earlier attraction. In particular, many Americans believed that the extremism that plagued European revolutions now contaminated American politics. One southern Whig feared that "new ideas of republican government are sought to be infused in the minds of our people by the teachings of European revolutionists." Disillusionment with European revolutions and revolutionaries also reveal a diminished sense of national self-confidence and a widespread fear in the North and South that Americans were increasingly unable to recapture the spirit or, worse, agree on the essence of their Revolution. Whereas the nation had responded to the French Revolution with vigorous partisan conflict over the meaning of their past and, by extension, the direction of future policy, congressional reaction to France's upheavals in 1848 was muted and ambivalent. The highlight of that year, which itself reflected a growing movement to preserve and create historic landmarks, was the laying of the cornerstone of the Washington National Monument. The contrast is instructive.²⁴

So, too, is the case of Cuban filibustering. Narciso López revived the issue of territorial expansion with two unsuccessful filibustering raids against Cuba in 1850 and 1851. The second raid cost him his life. Although he had supporters in the free and slave states, opposition to his freebooting ways was widespread. A growing number of Americans in 1851 believed that expansion no longer appeared to promote the ideals of liberty and equality. In stark contrast to the hubris that infused the war with Mexico, President Fillmore told Congress in his annual address in 1851 that the nation's mission was not to impose its opinions on other countries but to teach by example the blessings of free institutions and self-government. Editors North and South, while reiterating a belief in the nation's Manifest Destiny, also cautioned that territorial expansion, if it came at all, had to be by means honest and fair. Moreover, editors and congressmen alike insisted that new territory must be unoccupied, or peopled by a race sympathetic to, and supportive of, the republican institutions of the United States.

By the fall of 1850, a Maryland editor observed, "The divisions between the two parties now are merely artificial & for the most part personal." A North Carolina



Figure 19.1 This 1851 print valorizes efforts by American “filibusters” to seize Cuba from Spain. Efforts to extend the dominion of the United States over new slave territory were central to the aspirations of American slave owners. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-89602.

Whig ruefully agreed, remarking that “there is but little [partisan] feeling manifested between the old parties.” As the integrity and coherency of parties thus became less distinct, it became increasingly difficult to hold a middle line or a nationwide position on national and foreign affairs. As a result, the mood of the nation shifted, in John Higham’s words, from “boundlessness to consolidation.”²⁵ Disillusionment with Europe’s revolutionaries therefore was characterized by a sensitivity to residual sectional tensions and the angst that issued from a rapidly receding revolutionary past.

THE KANSAS-NEBRASKA ACT: THE POLITICS OF DELUSION

In February 1852, a southern Democrat fretted, “The Country was never more unsettled than at the present & there never was a time when we needed more a firmer and manly president who by a life time[']s service had so identified himself

with Democratic Principles, that he would not be tempted to do some new or strange things of doubtful propriety to render him popular.”²⁶ Unhappily that “firmer and manly president” would be the relatively unknown and largely feckless Franklin Pierce. Yet less important than this Democrat’s dashed hopes for the future was his sense of the unsettled state of politics on the eve of the 1852 presidential campaign. To many observers then and now, the Compromise of 1850 seemed to leave extremists North and South little on which to focus anti- and proslavery agitation. California’s admission to the Union was a fact. The principle of nonintervention with slavery in the territories of the Mexican Cession had for the moment blunted the growing sectional hostility that issued from the debate over Wilmot’s restrictionist proviso. Moreover, New Mexico and Utah were far removed from the capital, and though theoretically open to slavery, the 1860 census would report no slaves in New Mexico, and but a handful in Utah. Only the Fugitive Slave Act aroused hostility.

Most Americans proclaimed the Compromise “a finality.” Reality was somewhat more troubling. Both Whigs and Democrats were plagued with sectional differences over the meaning of the Compromise and weakened by internal factionalism. By the 1852 election, the Jacksonian two-party system was sectionalized, fragmented, and worn. Although the Democrats won a convincing victory in the electoral column essentially ending the political viability of the Whig party, Pierce’s advantage in the popular count was only 1.6 percent of 3 million votes cast. More ominously, as measured against the number of eligible voters, turnout sank to its lowest level since 1836.

To no one’s surprise, Pierce quickly proved himself to be an inept president. In the absence of effective political leadership, Stephen Douglas took it upon himself to reassert his party’s basic political tenets, and in the bargain, reinvigorate the democracy. To that end, he would combine western expansion, internal improvements (a transcontinental railroad), and popular sovereignty into a program that was embodied in the Kansas–Nebraska bill. It organized the lands west of Iowa and Missouri. Needing the support of southerners, and believing that the Compromise of 1850 embraced the non-intervention with slavery in the territories, Douglas wrote the principle of popular sovereignty into the bill and repealed the Missouri Compromise ban on slavery north of 36° 30’.

Unhappily for him and the nation, however, hundreds of thousands of northern Democrats and Whigs viewed western expansion as unsettling, not reinvigorating. They considered popular sovereignty (joined as it was to the repeal of the Missouri Compromise) not as reaffirming Democratic principles, but as a provocative and hostile initiative that jeopardized, rather than enhanced, public liberties.

Douglas was excoriated then and thereafter for repealing this “sacred” ban on slavery extension, and no one was harsher than Abraham Lincoln. In the Fall of 1854, Lincoln told an audience in Bloomington, Illinois, that slavery would only expand if it were able to gain a foothold in a territory before a government could be organized to ban it. Asserting that the right of self-government “rightly understood” was sacred, Lincoln charged that the Kansas–Nebraska Act was a gross violation of that principle. Here his indictment of popular sovereignty took a significant turn. If blacks were not humans, he claimed, “then it is right to allow the South to take their peculiar institution with them and plant it on the virgin soil of

Kansas and Nebraska.” If they were human, “then there is not even the shadow of popular sovereignty in allowing the first settlers upon such soil to decide whether it shall be right in all future time to hold men in bondage there.”²⁷

The legacy of the Revolution and in particular the essence of the Declaration of Independence remained central to his and the Republican Party’s critique of the Kansas–Nebraska Act and popular sovereignty in particular. As a result, race, the equal rights implications of the Declaration, and the moral division between Republicans and Democrats (and Lincoln and Douglas) became more salient in his and his party’s antislavery politics. Lincoln’s first steps onto this new political terrain in 1854 were tentative. Conceding that the doctrine of self-government was “absolutely and eternally right,” Lincoln emphatically denied that it applied to Douglas’s legislation. Put differently, popular sovereignty as an organizational principle for the territories depended “upon whether a negro is *not* or *is* a man. If he is *not* a man, why in that case he who *is* a man [read: slaveholder] may, as a matter of self-government, do just as he pleases with him. But if the negro *is* a man, is it not to that extent, a total destruction of self-government, to say that he too shall not govern *himself*?” Answering his own hypothetical question, Lincoln asserted that the master-slave relationship was a total violation of the faith that the powers of government are derived from the consent of those who are governed. “The master not only governs the slave without his consent,” he maintained, “but he governs him by a set of rules altogether different from those which he prescribes for himself.”²⁸

Lincoln fused this somewhat narrow and crabbed legal critique of popular sovereignty to the Revolution as it bore meaning in his mind and those of other antislavery northerners. Investing the settlers of Kansas and Nebraska with the power to decide whether they shall have slavery—and slaves—struck him as the old argument for the “Divine right of Kings” which allowed the King “to do just as he pleases with his white subjects, being responsible to God alone.” In the case of popular sovereignty, “the white man is to do just as he pleases with his black slaves, being responsible to God alone.” When the revolutionary generation found themselves the political slaves of George III and wanted their freedom, they asserted that the maxim “all men are created equal,” to be a self-evident truth. “[B]ut now that we have grown fat, and have lost all dread of being slaves ourselves,” he keened, “we have become so greedy to be *masters* that we call the same maxim ‘a self-evident lie.’” Lincoln sadly concluded that the Kansas–Nebraska Act proved that on the question of liberty, “we are not what we have been.”²⁹

By 1856, any semblance of constitutional government, law, and order had wilted on the dusty plains of Kansas. Although the people of Kansas were free to regulate their domestic institutions in their own way, the act was as silent as to the time when citizens could decide the status of slavery. This contributed to a real sense of urgency to settle the territory with “right-minded settlers” and thus seize political control of it. Subsequent widespread voting irregularities in Kansas quickly gave way to armed conflict between free- and slave-state settlers. “Bleeding Kansas” proved to a majority of northerners and many southerners that popular sovereignty was not an acceptable middle ground between the sectional extremes of slavery restriction and extension.³⁰ Politically it destroyed the ascendancy of the Democratic Party in

the North: In the off-year elections following the passage of the act, the party was only able to save twenty-five of ninety-one free-state seats it had won in 1852. The effect, not the intent, of the Act was to upset the bisectional balance of power within the Democratic Party, and thus weaken a powerful voice of nationalism in a period of growing sectional animosity.

LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATES: THE POLITICS OF INCLUSION

The Kansas debacle made a mockery of self-government. By extension the failure of popular sovereignty as an effective program that would address and redress growing sectionalism growing out of the Mexican Cession was, in a sense, the failure of the people to govern themselves. To members of the newly formed Republican Party, popular sovereignty had not provided a common ground, but a battle ground. For all of that, it was the *Dred Scott* decision which had the effect of dealing a Constitutional death blow to Douglas's principled and programmatic solution to the territorial issue, and raising larger questions of morality that infused the Declaration of Independence and the revolutionary heritage with a moral dimension that expanded the boundaries and the salience of political antislavery.

Two days after James Buchanan's inauguration, the Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Dred Scott v. Sanford*. Scott, a slave, had sued for his freedom on the grounds that residency in free-soil territory created by the Missouri Compromise of 1820 made him a free man. The Court chose to confront and resolve an issue—namely, whether Congress had the power to restrict slavery in the common territories—that politicians had been dodging for years. In a three-part decision, the Court decided that Scott remained a slave; that as a black man he was not a citizen, and therefore not entitled to sue in Federal courts; and that the Missouri Compromise ban on slavery was unconstitutional and in violation of slaveholder's property rights protected by the due process clause of the Fifth Amendment.³¹

Although Democrats North and South were quick to celebrate the decision, believing that it validated the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Court's ruling subverted the essence of popular sovereignty. By denying Congress the authority (or constitutional power) to restrict slavery in the territories, it logically followed that Washington could not empower territorial legislatures to do the same. The principled, practical, and political implications of this for the party, Douglas, and popular sovereignty would only emerge in the Lincoln-Douglas debates and the canvass of 1860. For the moment, Democrats hailed *Dred Scott* as the triumph of nationalism, a rebuke of sectionalism, and a fatal blow to abolitionism. *Dred Scott*, one party member rejoiced, "puts the whole basis of the Black Republican organization under the ban of law, stamps its designs as hostile to the Constitution, and forms a basis on which all conservative men of the Union can unite for the maintenance of the Constitution as it is and the Union as it is."³²

That is how it played in the Democratic Party. Republicans' response was a fierce onslaught in the northern press on the Court (six of whom were Democrats, and of those five were southerners) for transforming free territories into "one great slave pen." However therapeutic, damning the justices—especially Chief Justice Taney—fell a great deal short of addressing the Court's decision that rendered the core of the

Republican Party's appeal—restricting slavery—null and void. To deny the binding character of the judgment, Republicans charged that the Court usurped its power by deciding a question it had no right to address. Once it had denied Scott's suit for freedom, that was the end of the case and of the Court's authority in it.

Far more effective was their subsequent and reinforcing claim that *Dred Scott* was an intrinsic and inevitable step in the slavepower's conspiracy (working as it did through the Democratic party) to make slavery national. As Lincoln succinctly put it, "When we see a lot of framed timbers, different portions of which we know have been gotten out at different times and places by different workmen—Stephen [Douglas], Franklin [Pierce], Roger [Taney], and James [Buchanan] for instance—and when we see these timbers joined together . . . or if a single piece be lacking, we see the place in the frame exactly fitted and prepared to yet bring such a piece in, in such case we find it impossible to not *believe* that [these workmen] all understood one another from the beginning and all worked upon a common *plan* or *draft* drawn up before the first lick was struck."³³

But *Dred Scott* had deeper implications that transcended the political. As Christopher Bracey has argued, it was not just the repudiation of a political policy (whether it be popular sovereignty or restriction). The Court's decision, he contends, "signaled a rejection of an *idea*—the notion that blacks could be equal citizens." Put differently, to bestow citizenship is to grant full membership in the nation's political family. "We are, at the deepest levels, acknowledging that individual's essential humanity," Bracey observes. "We are telling that person that he or she is one of us—our political, social, and cultural equal." In reductive terms, *Dred Scott* denied the idea or even possibility of black humanity.³⁴

Although Lincoln only later came around to the conspiracy thesis that framed his and Republicans' attack on *Dred Scott*, he was initially hesitant to challenge the Court's decision. In fact, in the 1856 canvass, he asserted that the "Supreme Court of the United States is the tribunal to decide" questions involving disputes over slavery and restriction. But *Dred Scott* raised and made problematic the issue whether the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution—which together constituted the revolutionary heritage he and other antebellum Americans inherited—included blacks. Lincoln concluded that Taney and the other justices were doing "obvious violence to the plain unmistakable language of the Declaration." By making slavery perpetual and denying the humanity of those enslaved, the Declaration "is assailed, and sneered at, and construed and hawked at, and torn, till, if its framers could rise from their graves, they could not recognize it."³⁵

The fusion of slavery, race, and the Revolutionary heritage emerges most forcefully and starkly in Lincoln's seven debates with Douglas in 1858. As James Huston has persuasively maintained, the ironic and unintended impact of the Kansas-Nebraska Act was to make race more not less salient in the political discourse of the 1850s.³⁶ Douglas and others framed their defense of popular sovereignty, and by extension Democratic politics, in racist terms that perforce excluded blacks. Republicans like Lincoln logically concluded that Douglas's defense of popular sovereignty raised the question whether free blacks had natural rights and political rights. As a consequence, race, which had been largely absent from national politics in the 1840s and early 1850s, became central to political debate following the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854.

Ever since the introduction of Wilmot's proviso in 1846, antislavery politicians had cast themselves as the spiritual heirs of their revolutionary forbearers. Although they shared William Lloyd Garrison's absolutism and the Whig concept of Union and liberty, they saw the Constitution as an antislavery document and slavery restriction as a return to the first principles of the founders. Lincoln (and other antislavery politicians) fused antislavery politics, the (im)morality of slavery, and the revolutionary heritage into an evocative critique that issued in a broad-based platform that could unite various elements of antislavery and reform sentiment in the North.³⁷

The Declaration of Independence remained Lincoln's pole star as he steered his way to the higher ground (to mix the metaphor) of moral antislavery politics. The theory of the American system of government was "Universal Freedom," he asserted. Douglas and other supporters of the Kansas-Nebraska legislation, "teaches that the negro has no share, humble though it may be, in the Declaration of Independence, [and] is going back to the era of our liberty and independence, and . . . muzzling the cannon that thunders its annual joyous return . . . [and] is penetrating . . . the human soul, and eradicating the light of reason and the love of liberty. . . ." Douglas's construction of the Declaration, he claimed, "left no more at most, than an interesting memorial of the dead past[,] Shorn of its vitality and practical value." The effect, if not the intent, of the Kansas-Nebraska Act was to proclaim "ourselves political hypocrites before the world, by thus fostering Human Slavery and proclaiming ourselves, at the same time, the sole friends of Human Freedom." Closing the circle, Lincoln declared that popular sovereignty was logical "If you admit that slavery is as good and as right as freedom. . . . This is the difference, as I understand it, between the Republican and Democratic parties."³⁸

Although Lincoln insisted that blacks were entitled to all that the Declaration of Independence held out—"life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"—there were clear (and now well-known) limits to his views on race. He opposed bringing whites and blacks into any semblance of social and political equality. Lincoln repeatedly pointed out that he had opposed "making voters or jurors of negroes, [or] qualifying them to hold office, [or] to intermarry with white people." In fact, he contended that "a separation of the races is the only perfect preventative of amalgamation." Turning Douglas's popular sovereignty on its head, he asserted that "if white and black people never get together in Kansas, they will never mix blood in Kansas. . . . Yet Judge Douglas dreads the slightest restraints on the spread of slavery, and the slightest human recognition of the negro as tending horribly to amalgamation."³⁹

It was Douglas, however, who made the clearest and most invidious connection between race and the Revolutionary heritage. Time and again he noted that many of the founders, but especially Jefferson, were slaveholders and that all thirteen colonies tolerated the institution. But the central point on which he dilated was that "this Government was made by our fathers on a white basis. It was made by white men for the benefit of white men and their posterity forever, and was intended to be administered in all time to come as white men. . . . [T]here is but one path of peace in this Republic, and that is to administer this Government as our fathers made it, divided into free States and slave States, allowing each State to decide for itself whether it wants slavery or not."⁴⁰

Lincoln concluded that the difference between Douglas and himself—between northern Democrats and Republicans—did not involve the question of states' rights or any desire to make invidious distinctions between the rights of the citizens of the several states. The issue, he stated, was the preservation of republican institutions—the eternal struggle between the two principles of right and wrong. He scoffed at the notion that popular sovereignty in any form could end slavery agitation. And the idea that the Kansas settlement had stopped it, Lincoln thought insane. “There is no way of putting an end to the slavery agitation amongst us but to put it back upon the basis where our fathers put it,” he advised. “Restrict it forever to the old States where it now exists.” If we would arrest the spread of it—if we would place it where Washington, Jefferson, and Madison placed it . . . the public mind would be at rest in the belief of its ultimate extinction.” New territories, Lincoln demanded, must be preserved in such a condition “that white men may find [a] home . . . where they can settle upon some new soil and better their condition in life.”⁴¹

REPUBLICAN PERIL: THE POLITICS OF REVOLUTION

By the fall of 1859, southern moderates found Lincoln's heretical arguments alarming, though hardly novel. They denied that he or his party represented any American principle. Despite the Republicans strong showing in the 1856 presidential election, states' rights southerners, mostly Democrats, scorned the party as a faction “strong in the ignorant prejudices of the northern masses, [and] led by farseeing and unprincipled leaders.” Although Republican attacks were expected, though not welcomed, strains within their own party were more threatening. They alienated slave-state Democrats from the Buchanan administration and, especially, Douglas. The president's inept and shifting handling of Kansas forfeited the trust and support of many southern Democrats who were lukewarm to his presidency from its inception. Douglas's claim in his debate with Lincoln at Freeport that the South's peculiar institution could not “exist a day or an hour anywhere, unless it is supported by local police regulations” seemed to vitiate, if not negate, the ban on slavery restriction embodied in *Dred Scott*.⁴²

John Brown's attack on Harpers Ferry in October melded these two strands of sectional alienation. Inasmuch as Brown was not known to be a member of any political party and was thought to be a fanatic (which he was), southerners concluded that he had been inspired by William Henry Seward's theory of an “irrepressible conflict” between the free and slave states. Free-state Democrats, whose ranks had been depleted by defections to the antislavery Republican Party, seemed to be unable or unwilling “to arrest the growing fanaticism and aggressive predominance of the North. As southern Democrats (and their fire-eater fellow travelers) looked to the coming presidential election, they concluded that a Republican administration “would unchain the spirit of fanaticism and encourage it to the committal of the wildest excesses.”⁴³ Put simply, to these southerners, abolitionism and Republicanism were distinctions without differences. The discovery of the “Secret Six” Republicans who gave aid and comfort to Brown proved the point exactly.

By the secession crisis in the winter of 1860–61, free-soil northerners and states' rights southerners believed each other to be engaged in a plot or conspiracy to control America and to deny the other a role or participation in the national government.

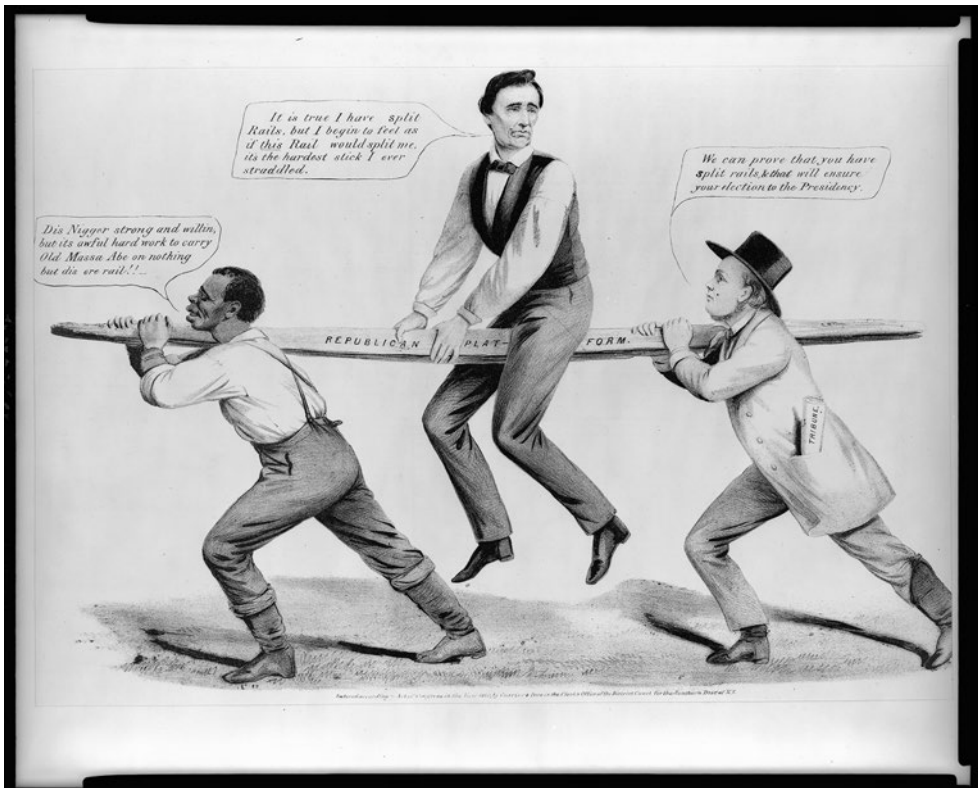


Figure 19.2 This 1860 Currier and Ives print depicts the difficulties the Republican Party faced due to its antislavery politics. Democrats regularly referred to the Republican Party as the “Black Republican Party,” and in this print Abraham Lincoln, carried by a man of color and New York antislavery newspaper editor Horace Greeley, worries that the antislavery plank in the 1860 party platform might lead to his political undoing. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-10393.

The crisis of American democracy had come to a head with the election of Lincoln. As the choice of a clear majority of an alien electorate (as southerners had it), Lincoln loomed as a foreign tyrant in the South’s future. He would rule over an entire section now relegated to second-class citizenship. His election was the failure of democracy. To preserve the republican essence of the Constitution and the Union, the South seceded. Northerners believed that the slave states, now debauched beyond anyone’s imagination, were unwilling to accept the popular choice of the electoral process. By seceding, an aristocratic South repudiated the fundamental premises and principles of republican government. The North resisted secession to preserve the Union and the natural operation of constitutional democracy.

After a thirteen-year struggle with Great Britain, Thomas Jefferson asserted in the Declaration of Independence that they were “one people” determined to break the “political bands . . . with another.” After a fourteen-year battle over the extension

of slavery to the territories, Republicans would claim in 1860 that the disruption of the Union did not result from “the democratic element in our politics. . . . It is the collision which has taken place between democracy on the one hand, and this foreign element and doubly aristocratical institution of negro slavery on the other.” In the South, secessionists claimed that if they were engaged in a great civil war, “as well might we designate the Revolutionary war a civil war.” Common to both, “the efforts of one portion of the people are concerned in throwing off a tyrannical and oppressive power, and the establishment of a form of government under which they can enjoy the rights and liberties which are the inalienable right of freemen.”⁴⁴

Therefore, secession was not, as many would have it, in essence a conflict between states’ rights and an indivisible Union. From the South’s perspective, secession was not a remedy for past wrongs, but a guarantee for future greatness. A Florida editor maintained that secession was a conservative remedy to preserve American liberties. Let southerners remember, another disunionist wrote, that the practical spirit of conservatism prompted the Founding Fathers to sever the bonds that united them to the mother country. “They then asserted self-government as necessary to a conservation of their rights,” he proclaimed, “and we are now invoked by the same spirit of conservation to dissolve our present political Union, in order to retain that inheritance of self-government.” Secessionists not only intended to preserve these rights for themselves, Alabama’s Clement Claiborne Clay observed, “but were determined “to transmit to their posterity, the freedom they received from their ancestors, or perish in the attempt.”⁴⁵ And so they did.

Northerners would certainly agree with fire-eaters that the meaning and future of American liberties and democracy articulated and defined by the Revolution were at stake in the secession crisis. But the supposed crime, the offense of Republicans’ supporters, was their determination to follow the policies of the Founding Fathers. The mind boggled. A dumbfounded Henry Wilson gasped, “We Republicans are arraigned by [southern] Senators for having embodied in our platform of principles the sublime creed of the Declaration of Independence.” Ohio’s Benjamin Stanton pledged in the House, “The Republican party claims and maintains no principle, and proposes to carry into practice no policy, that has not been sanctioned by the fathers of the Republic, and practiced by every Administration from George Washington to General Harrison.” As he prepared for Lincoln’s inauguration, a fellow Illinois Republican wrote that the success of his administration would determine “whether the principles of our Declaration [of Independence] are to prevail, or fall. Whether our country is to remain on the basis of our fathers or is to be changed into a semi-despotism of a few.”⁴⁶

Lincoln had it right—or half right—at Gettysburg. Northerners and southerners perished by the tens of thousands to ensure “that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from this earth.” The Civil War was to be understood to be a test of whether any nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to equality could long endure. It was more than that, however. Lincoln’s opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, his understanding of the subsequent chaos in Kansas, and his analysis of the implications of the *Dred Scott* decision infused or imbued the Revolution and the Declaration of Independence with a moral dimension that expanded the boundaries and the salience of political antislavery. Put in reductive

terms, it was less what Lincoln and other Republicans like Seward and Sumner denied African-Americans, but what they seemed to claim for them: the implication that the Declaration of Independence promised more than freedom from slavery. And to that extent, as Don Fehrenbacher argued decades ago, Lincoln's views on the Declaration were subversive of the social arrangements he had endorsed in his debates with Douglas.⁴⁷

Republicans' antislavery politics—and those of most northerners, including Republicans—were ironically and tragically limited and offset by the revolutionary heritage that shaped and informed the Republic from its creation to the American Civil War. Writing in 1855 to his friend Joshua Speed, Lincoln chastised him for assuming “that I have no interest in a thing which has, and continually exercises, the power of making me miserable. You ought to appreciate how much the great body of the Northern people do crucify their feelings in order to maintain their loyalty to the constitution and Union.”⁴⁸ More was the pity.

NOTES

- 1 “Second Inaugural Address,” March 4, 1865, in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler, 8 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953–55), 8:332; Nahum Capen, *Plain Facts and Considerations: Addressed to the People of the United States, without Distinction of Party, in Favor of James Buchanan, of Pennsylvania, for President, and John C. Breckinridge, of Kentucky, for Vice President. By an American Citizen* (Boston, 1856), 27.
- 2 *Pittsburgh Morning Post*, April 25, 1857; Jacob E. Cooke, ed. *The Federalist* (Middletown, 1961), 64.
- 3 “Manifest Destiny,” *New York Morning News*, December 27, 1845. John Quincy Adams had much earlier maintained that the United States was destined to be “coextensive with the North American Continent, destined by God and nature to be the most populous and powerful people ever combined in a social compact.” The issue of slavery extension, first in the question of Texas annexation and then into the lands acquired from Mexico, Adams believed, were driven by sectional not national impulses. He vehemently opposed both. Bradford Perkins, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*, Volume 1, *The Creation of a Republican Empire, 1776–1865* (New York, 1993), 4.
- 4 Edward P. Crapol, *John Tyler, the Accidental President* (Chapel Hill, 2006), 2.
- 5 Crapol, *John Tyler*, 177 (Tyler's foreign and domestic policy); Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: 2011), 91 (“threat” of British abolitionists). See also Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas* (New York, 1972). In a nuanced, deeply informed, and persuasive analysis, Joel Silbey contends that annexation proved a fatal turning point in shaping sectional tensions. Although Silbey maintains that principled partisan differences defined the debate over annexation, Tyler's initiative laid bare and exacerbated sectional tensions within the Democracy. Silbey, *The Storm Over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to Civil War* (New York, 2005).
- 6 Major L. Wilson, *Space, Time, and Freedom: The Quest for Nationality and the Irrepressible Conflict, 1815–1861* (Westport, CT: 1974) remains the ground-breaking monograph on the philosophical and principled differences between Democrats who wanted to expand freedom over space and Whigs who wished to develop and enhance it over time.
- 7 Quotations in Perkins, *Creation of a Republican Empire*, 185, 186.

- 8 “Blades of Shears” metaphor was first articulated by Thomas Hart Benton. But it is an organizational metaphor for the discussion of the proviso and its impact in David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861* (New York, 1976), Chapter 4 (“Forging the Territorial Shears”).
- 9 Salmon P. Chase and Charles D. Cleveland, *Antislavery Addresses of 1844 and 1845* (Philadelphia, 1867), 76, 77, 17.
- 10 *Congressional Globe*, 29th Cong. 2d sess. Appendix, 76–77.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 236, 133; William H. Morrell to Willie P. Mangum, January 1, 1847, in *The Papers of Willie Person Mangum*, ed., Henry Thomas Shanks, 5 vols. (Raleigh, 1950–55), 5–12; *Congressional Globe*, 30th Cong. 1st sess., Appendix, 300 Outlaw to Emily Outlaw, February 3, 1848, David Outlaw Papers, Southern Historical Collection (University of North Carolina).
- 12 Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca, 1985), 133 (first quotation); Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA, 1981), 239 (second quotation). At the outbreak of the war, the abolitionist editor Owen Lovejoy thought that the people of Danville, Illinois, were “mad.” “If they had roasted a Mexican,” he wrote, “I am not at all sure but they would have made a feast of him.” *Western Citizen* (Chicago, IL), June 23, 1846. Taking measure of war mania and the racism that fueled it, a Pennsylvania abolitionist noted tartly that when “colored people . . . made any effort to recover their own rights or enlarge their own freedom, they are denounced as worthless vagabonds—a nuisance to society—and treated accordingly; but when they forget what is due to themselves and offer their services to their oppressors to help them extend the area of their hateful system, they become at once ‘most respectable and worthy persons.’” *Pennsylvania Freeman* (Philadelphia) May 28, 1846.
- 13 *Western Citizen* (Chicago), February 23, 1847. Gamaliel Bailey sniffed, “The editor of the *Liberator* takes his stand in Boston, in the heart of the Free States, anathematizes the South, and appeals to the North in behalf of disunion. All this is in harmony with his creed—he is perfectly consistent.” *National Era* (Washington, DC) July 22, 1847. On Bailey’s earlier falling out with Garrison over the latter’s “advocacy of extraneous issues” which would likely “contribute only to the discord among abolitionists,” see Stanley Harrold, *Gamaliel Bailey and Antislavery Union* (Kent, OH, 1986), 21–22 (quotation at 22).
- 14 I believe that David Potter had it exactly right thirty years ago that the Mexican War, but more specifically Wilmot’s proviso, together reshaped the political landscape: “the slavery question became the sectional question, the sectional question became the slavery question, and both became the territorial question. . . . Thus slavery suddenly emerged as a transcendent sectional issue in its own right, and as a catalyst of all sectional antagonisms, political, economic and cultural. . . . [F]or now all the pent-up moral indignation which had been walled in by the constitutional inhibition could be ventured into the territorial question. Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 48–49.
- 15 Although he does not make this argument precisely, it is a distinct and critical leitmotif in Frederick J. Blue, *No Taint of Compromise: Crusaders in Antislavery Politics* (Baton Rouge, 2005). See also, Vernon L. Volpe, *Forlorn Hope of Freedom: The Liberty Party in the Old Northwest, 1838–1848* (Kent, OH, 1990).
- 16 *Watchman of the Valley* reprinted in *Western Citizen*, May 20, 1846. Similarly, the editor of the *Western Citizen* maintained, “In the anti-slavery field there is ample scope for the exercise of all the diversity of talents that were ever arrayed on a moral subject.” *Ibid.*, March 18, 1846. On women’s petitions against Indian removal, see Alisse Portnoy, *Their Right to Speak: Women’s Activism in the Indian and Slave Debates* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).

- 17 “Address of the Ladies Antislavery Association of Dundee to the Electors of the Fourth Congressional District,” *Western Citizen*, March 25, 1846. See also Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill, 2003).
- 18 *Western Citizen*, April 1, 1846; *ibid.*, March 18, 1846, *Voice of Industry*, November 26, 1847, in Philip S. Foner and Herbert Shapiro, eds. *Northern labor and Antislavery: A Documentary History* (Westport: 1994), 104; *Voice of Industry*, February 26, 1847, 53; *Religious Telegraph*, November 25, 1846. See also Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* (New York, 2005), esp. 1–8, 145–46.
- 19 Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes*, 33–46 (quotation at 34); Blue, *No Taint of Compromise*, 142 (first Swisshelm quotation); Jane G. Swisshelm to Mr. Fleeson, *The Anti-Slavery Standard*, June 18, 1846; “Address of the Ladies Antislavery Association of Dundee to the Electors of the Fourth Congressional District,” *Western Citizen*, March 25, 1846. On female antislavery activists, see especially, Stacey Robertson, *Hearts Beating for Liberty: Women Abolitionists in the Old Northwest* (Chapel Hill, 2010).
- 20 Oberlin Evangelist, October 28, 1846; *National Era*, January 14, 1847; *Western Citizen*, March 18, 1846. See also, Morrison, *Slavery and the American West*, 43–44, 56–58, 60–62, 77–78, 120–21, 146–47, 163–64, 270–71, 169–71, 182–83.
- 21 Wendell Phillips, “Disunion,” *Liberty Bell* (1847), 18; 16th Annual Report of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, in *North Star*, March 17, 1848; Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, ed. William Gilman et al., 16 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960–82), 9:430–31.
- 22 *Congressional Globe*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., 560.
- 23 Elbert B. Smith, *The Presidencies of Zachary Taylor & Millard Fillmore* (Lawrence, 1988), 41 (“not an ultra Whig”); John S.D. Eisenhower, *Zachary Taylor: The American Presidents Series: The 12th President, 1849–1850* (New York, 2008), 81 (“party schemes”).
- 24 “Despotic institutions” in John Higham, *From Boundlessness to Consolidation: The Transformation of American Culture, 1848–1860* (Ann Arbor, 1969), 18; *Columbus* (GA) *Inquirer*, May 4, 1852.
- 25 T. L. Wills to Daniel M. Barringer, Oct. 7, 1850, Box 2, Folder 19, Daniel M. Barringer Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; William A. Graham to James Graham, Jan. 6, 1851, in *Papers of William Alexander Graham*, ed. J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton and Max R. Williams, 7 vols. (Raleigh, 1957–84), 4: 3; Higham, *From Boundlessness to Consolidation*, 18.
- 26 John C. Darby to J. Warren Grigsby, Feb. 14, 1852, File 258, John Warren Grigsby Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, KY.
- 27 “Speech at Bloomington, Illinois,” Sept. 26, 1854, in Basler, ed., *Works of Lincoln*, 2: 239.
- 28 “Speech at Peoria, Illinois,” Oct. 16, 1854, *ibid.*, 265–66.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 278; Lincoln to George Robinson, Aug. 15, 1855, *ibid.*, 318.
- 30 The fullest and most insightful treatment of the principled and violent conflict in Kansas is Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence, KS, 2004).
- 31 Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics* (New York, 1978), remains the definitive account. But for more recent views—historical, contemporary, and judicial—of this defining moment in antebellum politics and legal history, see David Thomas Konig, Paul Finkelman, and Christopher Alan Bracey, eds., *The Dred Scott Case: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Race and Law* (Athens, OH, 2010).
- 32 Quoted in Morrison, *Slavery and the American West*, 195.
- 33 Lincoln, Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Lincoln*, 2: 465–66. Lincoln’s analysis may be compared to Thomas Jefferson’s analysis of British machinations in 1774. Jefferson stated

that though “single acts of tyranny may be ascribed to the accidental opinion of a day . . . a series of oppressions begun at a distinguished period and pursued unalterably through every change of ministers, too plainly prove a deliberate and systematic plan of reducing us to slavery.” Quoted in Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 119–20.

- 34 Christopher Alan Bracey, “*Dred Scott*, Human Dignity, and the Quest for a Culture of Equality,” in Konig et al., eds., *Dred Scott Case*, 120, 121.
- 35 David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York, 1995), 200, 201. See also William E. Gienapp, *Abraham Lincoln and Civil War America* (New York, 2002), 57–58.
- 36 James L. Huston, “Putting African Americans at the Center of national Discourse: The Strange Fate of Popular Sovereignty,” in Daniel McDonough and Kenneth W. Noe, eds., *Politics and Culture of the Civil War Era: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Johannsen* (Selinsgrove, PA, 2006), 96–128.
- 37 Morrison, *Slavery and the American West*, 56. Henry Mayer has contended that Garrisonians’ moral suasion had political consequences. I would contend that Lincoln’s political critique—his antislavery politics—had moral implications. Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York, 1998), 512.
- 38 “Speech at Springfield, Illinois,” Oct. 4, 1854, and “Speech at Peoria, Illinois,” Oct. 16, 1854, “Speech at Springfield, Illinois,” June 26, 1857, all in Basler, *Collected Works of Lincoln*, 2: 245 (“theory of government”), 234 (“muzzling the cannon”—Lincoln could have also meant *canon*), 407 (“interesting memorial of the past”), 242 (“hypocrites”); Speech at Paris, Illinois, Sept. 7, 1858, *ibid.*, 3: 93 (“slavery is good”). In the light of the *Dred Scott* decision, Lincoln had serious doubts whether there was any semblance of logic to popular sovereignty. In his first debate with Douglas in Ottawa, he hooted, “My understanding is that Popular Sovereignty, as now applied to the question of Slavery, does allow the people of a Territory to have Slavery if they want to, but does not allow them *not* to have it if they *do not* want it.” “First Debate with Stephen A. Douglas at Ottawa, Illinois,” Aug. 21, 1858, *ibid.*, 3: 19.
- 39 “Fourth Debate with Stephen A. Douglas at Charleston, Illinois,” Sept. 18, 1858, *ibid.*, 3: 145 (“making voter or jurors”); “Speech at Springfield, Illinois,” June 26, 1857, *ibid.*, 2: 408 (“never mix blood in Kansas”).
- 40 Harold Holzer, ed., *The Lincoln–Douglas Debates: The First Complete, Unexpurgated Text* (New York, 1993), 151–52.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 181, 312.
- 42 *Floridian and Journal* (Tallahassee), Apr. 21, 1860; Stephen Douglas, *The Letters of Stephen A. Douglas*, ed., Robert W. Johannsen (Urbana, 1961), 672.
- 43 First quote in Steven A. Channing, *Crisis of Fear: Secession in South Carolina* (New York, 1970), 92; *Mississippian* (Jackson, MS), Oct. 25, 1859.
- 44 New-York (NY) *Daily Tribune*, Nov. 27, 1860; Memphis (TN) *Daily Avalanche*, Apr. 15, 1861.
- 45 *Floridian and Journal*, Nov. 24, 1860; *Daily South Carolinian* (Columbia), Dec. 2, 1860; *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong. 2nd sess. 486.
- 46 *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 2nd sess. 57; O. M. Cooley to Elihu B. Washburne, Jan. 2, 1861, vol. 12, Elihu B. Washburne Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- 47 Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850s* (Stanford, 1952), 111. Daniel Walker Howe has similarly contended that Lincoln’s use of the Declaration of Independence looked both backward and forward in time. Thus, Jefferson’s proposition that “all men are created equal” became a positive goal for political action, not simply a pre-political state that government should preserve by inaction. Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago, 1979), 291.

- 48 Lincoln to Speed, Aug. 24. 1855, in Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Lincoln*, 2:320. For a fuller and insightful exploration of the conflicted feelings of northerners who detested slavery (one absolute) but cherished the Union (another absolute), see Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 44–50. Potter rightly notes that, for most northerners, the territorial issue was not a choice of alternatives—antislavery or proslavery—but of ranking values. Looking at the essence of the Lincoln–Douglas debates, Fehrenbacher similarly concluded that they “do not reflect the ultimate conflict between abolitionist and slaveholder. They embody instead the principle cleavage in Northern thought, which, though narrower, had its own profound influence on the course of events.” Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness*, 109.

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